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General Bounce

Or

The Lady and the Locusts

By

G. J. Whyte Melville

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GENERAL BOUNCE;

OR,

THE LADY AND THE LOCUSTS

CHAPTER XIV.

To Persons about to Marry.

A LOUNGE IN THE PARK—THE NOON OF FASHION—THE FAIR EQUESTRIAN—A LOVER ON FOOT—BOUNCE'S COMFORTERS—THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER—A FRIEND'S ADVICE.

IT was high noon in the great world of London, that is to say, it was about half-past five, P.M., and the children of Mammon were in full dress. In the streets gay, glittering, well-appointed carriages were bowling smoothly along, with sleek horses stepping proudly together, and turning, as coachmen say, on a sixpence, guided by skilful pilots who could drive to an inch. Inside, shaded by parasols of the most gorgeous hues, sat fair delicate women, dressed to the utmost perfection of the art, with aërial bonnets at the very back of their glossy hair and dainty heads, bent down as they reclined upon their cushions,

till every upward glance shot from beneath those sweeping eyelashes bore a tenfold shaft of conquest against the world. Anon taper fingers in white kid gloves were kissed to a dandy on the pavement, and the fortunate dandy bowed, and sprang erect again, a taller man by an inch. 'Tis always judicious to *appear* on the best of terms with smart ladies in coronetted carriages. Bond-street was in a state of siege—'Redmayne's' looked like a beehive—'Hunt and Roskill's' resembled a flower-show—country cousins were bewildered and overcome—quiet old gentlemen like ourselves were pining for their strawberries and their roses—wearied servants meditated on the charms of beer—the narrow strip of sky overhead smiled blue as the Mediterranean, and the tide of carriages in Piccadilly was like the roar of the ocean. In the Park, though the space was greater, yet did the crowd appear no less—double lines of carriages blocked up the drive by the Serpentine, and unassuming broughams, with provokingly pretty faces inside, halted perforce amongst the matronage of England, defiant in the liveries and escutchcons of their lawful lords. In the Ride, the plot was thickening still, and half a country seemed to be gathering on 'the broad road'—we speak literally, not metaphorically—mounted on steeds worth a a prince's ransom, we ought to say, but here our conscientious regard for verity compels us to stop short, and to remark, that although every now and

then our eye may be gladdened by that most beautiful of all spectacles, a handsome woman on a fine horse, yet in many sorry instances the gentlemen of England, who 'sit at home at ease,' effectually prevent their wives and daughters from enjoying a like sedentary composure, by mounting them on the veriest '*rips*' that ever disgraced a side-saddle, 'He 'll do to carry a lady,' they say of some wretch that has neither pace, nor strength, nor action, for themselves, and forthwith gentle woman, blest in her ignorance tit-tups along, nothing doubting, upon this tottering skeleton. Fortune favours her own sex, but *if* anything happens a woman is almost sure to be hurt. No—to carry a lady, a horse ought to be as near perfection as it is possible for that animal to arrive—strong, fast, well-shaped, handsome, and fine-tempered, his good qualities and his value should correspond with the treasure and the charms which are confided to his charge. But we have said there are exceptions, and Blanche's bay horse, 'Water King,' was a bright particular star among his equine fellows. Humble pedestrians stopped to gaze open-mouthed on that shapely form—the marble crest, the silky mane, the small quivering ear, the wide, proud nostril, and the game, wild eye,—the round, powerful frame, hard and smooth and well defined as sculptured marble, showing on the 'off-side' its whole lengthy proportions, uninterrupted save by girth and saddle-flap, and the little edge of cambric handker-

chief peeping from the latter. High-couraged as he was gentle, few horses could canter up the Ride, like 'Water King,' and as he bent himself to his mistress's hand, snorting in his pride, his thin black tail swishing in the air, and his glossy skin flecked with foam, many a smart philosopher of the '*nil admirari*' school turned upon his saddle to approve, and drawled to his brother idler, 'Gad, that's a monstrous clever horse, and *rather* a pretty girl riding him.' Major D'Orville thought they were a charming couple as he accompanied Miss Kettering and her steed with the careful air of proprietorship seldom assumed save by an accepted suitor. The Major was a delightful companion for the park. He knew everybody, and everybody knew him. He had the knack of making that sort of quiet disjointed conversation which accords so well with an equestrian *tête-à-tête*. Defend us at all times from a long story! but especially on horseback. The Major's remarks, however, were seldom too diffuse. 'You see that man on the cream-coloured horse,' he would say, that's 'Discount, the famous money-lender. He gave a dinner yesterday to ten people that cost a hundred pounds, and he's telling everybody to day all the particulars of the 'Carte' and the 'Bill.' 'Do you know that lady with the dark eyes and a netting all over her horse? —that's Lady Legerdemain—she keeps a legion of spirits, as she says, and will raise the dead for you any night you like to go to her house in Tyburnia

Proper.' 'How shocking!' Blanche replies, with a look of incredulity. 'Fact,' I assure you, returns the Major. 'Sir Roger Rearsby asked to see an old brother officer who was killed at Toulouse, and they showed him his own French cook! but Lady Legerdemain says the spirits are fallible just like ourselves. Who's this in uniform?—why, it's 'Uppy' —he don't look very disconsolate, does he, Miss Kettering?' and the Major smiled a meaning smile, and Blanche looked down and blushed. 'Some men would not 'wear the willow' so contentedly'—proceeded D'Orville, lowering his voice to a half-melancholy tone—'it's setting too much upon a cast to ask a question when a negative is to swamp one's happiness for life. I honour the man that has the courage to do it, but for my part I confess I have *not*.' 'I never knew you were deficient in that particular,' replied Blanche, looking down again, and blushing deeper than before. Blanche! Blanche! you little coquette, you are indeed coming on in the atmosphere of London—you like the Major very much, but you know you do not like him well enough to marry him—yet you would be unhappy to lose him, you spoilt child!—and so you lead him on like this, and look more bewitching than ever with those downcast eyes and long silky lashes. Notwithstanding their difference of years our pair are playing a game very common in society, called 'Diamond cut diamond.' 'I am a thorough coward in some things,'

returned D'Orville, not without a flush of conscious pride, as he remembered how his spirit used to rise with the tide of battle; 'like all other cowards, nothing would make me bold but the certainty of success,' he pressed closer to 'Water King's' side, and sank his voice almost to a whisper as he added —'Could I but hope for *that*, I could dare anything. Could I but think that my devotion, my idolatry, was not entirely thrown away, I should be——'; the Major stopped short, for Blanche turned pale as death, and her head drooped as if she must have fallen from her horse.

What made the girl start and sicken as though an adder had stung her to the quick?—What made her lean her little hand for support on 'Water-King's' strong firm neck, because her brain was reeling and everything,—joy,—sunshine,—existence seemed to be passing away? Was it for the mute reproach conveyed by that pale face among the crowd—was it for the calm broad eye, bent on her 'more in sorrow than in anger,' and seeming, as it gazed, to bid her an eternal farewell?

Frank Hardingstone had seen it all. Unobserved himself among the pedestrians that thronged the foot-way, he had marked Blanche and her cavalier as they paced slowly down the Ride, had marked the girl's flush of triumph as her admirer drew closer and closer to her side, had marked that nameless 'something' between the pair which people can never

entirely conceal when they 'understand each other,' and had drawn his own conclusions from the sight. But the decencies of society must be preserved, though the heart is breaking, and Frank drew himself up and took his hat off with a bow that did honour to his qualities as an actor. The old gentleman in gaiters and the tall boy from Eton on either side of him never guessed the amount of mental agony undergone by a fellow-creature whom they actually touched! Civilization has its tortures as well as barbarism. Blanche, too, returned the courtly gesture, but her weaker nature was scarcely equal to the effort, and had it not been that Uncle Baldwin had fidgetted up, on the instant, in more than his usual hurry to get home, she was conscious that her strength must have given way, and—feel for her, beautiful and daring Amazons who frequent the Ride!—that she must have burst into tears, and made a scene in the park!

Now old Bounce, albeit a gentleman of extremely punctual habits, as is often the case with those who have nothing to do, and moreover, a man of healthy appetite and a strong regard for the dinner-hour, had never before betrayed such a morbid anxiety to get home and dress, as on the occasion in question. The fact is he, too, was restless and excited, although the sensation had its own peculiar charms for the veteran, who entertained at sixty, a spice of that romance which is often erroneously considered

peculiar to sixteen. Yes, 'the boy with the bow' no more disdained to take a shot at Bounce than at Falstaff, and our old friend was even now balancing on the brink of that eventful plunge which, if not made before 'the grand climacteric,' it is generally thought advisable to postpone *sine die*. Mary Delaval had made an unconscious conquest. The feeling had been gradually but surely developed, and the constant presence of such a woman had been too much, even for a heart hardened by more than forty years of soldiering, baked by an Indian sun, and further defended by triple plies of flannel, worn for chronic rheumatism, and usually esteemed as effective a rampart against the assaults of love as the 'æs triplex' of Horace itself. First the General thought 'this Mrs. Delaval was a very nice creature. 'Zounds! it's lucky for her I'm not a younger man!' Then he arrived at '*Beautiful* woman, begad. *Zounds!* it's lucky for *me* she's not half aware of her attractions!' and from that the transition was easy and natural to 'Sensible person: such manners, such dignity; fit for any position in the world. Zounds! I'll make her Mrs. Bounce—do as I like—my own commanding officer, nobody else to consult—of course *she* won't throw such a chance away.' This latter consideration, however, although he repeated it to himself twenty times a-day, had hitherto prevented the General from making any very decided attack. When a man, even an old one, *really* cares for a

woman, he is always somewhat diffident of success, and Mary's sexagenarian suitor, though bold as brass in theory, was like any other lover in practice. But the breakfast at the barracks had wonderfully encouraged the General. He found Mrs. Delaval constantly at his side. He knew nothing of her previous acquaintance with D'Orville, still less could he guess at the secret which lay buried in her heart, and which was fading her beauty and deepening her expression day by day. How could he tell whose tears they were that blistered the newspaper on that *African Mail* column? so the natural conclusion at which he arrived was, that the same charms which had done such execution in India, and had driven the Cheltenham widow to the verge of despair, were again at their old tricks; and that having succeeded in attaching the most adorable of her sex, it only remained for him, in common humanity, to present her with all that was left of his fascinating self. And now began in earnest the General's qualms and misgivings. It was a tremendous step: he had never done it before; though often on the brink, he had always drawn back in time, and yet many of his old friends had got through it. Mulligatawney had married a widow—by the by was Mrs. Delaval a widow? he had never thought of asking—perhaps her husband was alive? At any rate this state of uncertainty was not to be borne, and after consulting one or two of his old cronies, and getting their

opinions, he would take some decided step—that he would—ask the question, and stand the shot like a man. The General agreed with Montrose:—

> 'He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his deserts are small,
> Who dares not put it to the touch,
> To win or lose it all.'

In pursuance of this doughty resolution, our veteran warrior took advantage of his niece's long *tête-à-tête* with Major D'Orville, to drop behind on the black cob, and sound his two old friends, Mulligatawney of the Civil Service, and Sir Bloomer Buttercup of no service at all, save that of the ladies, on the important step which he meditated taking.

'Lonely place, London,' said the General, reining in the cob, and settling himself into what he considered a becoming attitude; 'at least, for a bachelor. No solitude like that of a crowd.—What?'

'Better be alone than bothered to death by women,' growled Mulligatawney, a thin, withered, sour-looking individual, with a long, yellow face. 'I *like* London, *en garçon*, only Mrs. Mulligatawney always *will* come up whenever I do. Egad, you bachelors don't know when you're well off.'

'Poor bachelors,' simpered Sir Bloomer Buttercup, riding up with his best air, he having dropped behind (a young rogue!), to make eyes at a very smart lady on the *trottoir*. 'Poor fellows, nobody lets us alone, Bounce, and yet we're perfectly harm-

less—innocent as doves. I wish I was married, though, too; it fixes one, eh?—keeps the butterfly constant to the rose;' and Sir Bloomer heaved his padded chest with an admirably got-up sigh, still shooting *œillades* at the nowise disconcerted lady on the *trottoir*. You would hardly have guessed Sir Bloomer to be sixty-five; at least, not as he appeared before the world on that cantering grey horse. To be sure, he had his riding costume on; riding hat, riding wig, riding coat, trowsers, boots, and padding; not to mention a belt, the loosening of which let the whole fabric fall to pieces. They say he is lifted on his horse; we have reason to believe he could not *walk* five yards in that dress to save his life. Perhaps if we saw him, as his valet does, divested of his beautiful white teeth, his dark hair and whiskers, his florid healthy colour, and that stalwart, deep-chested figure of buckram and wadding which encases the real man within, we might not be disposed to question the accuracy of Burke's *Peerage aud Baronetage* in point of dates. But as he sits now on his high-broke horse, in his well-stuffed saddle, the very youngest of the shavelings who aspire to dandyism call him 'Buttercup' to his face, and plume themselves on his notice, and quote him, and look up to him, not as a beacon, but an example.

'You're *right*, sir, says the General,' with his accustomed energy, in a tone that makes the black cob start beneath him. 'Don't tell me—should have

married forty years ago. Never mind: better late than never. Now I'll tell you, I've thought of it. We're not to live entirely for ourselves. How d'ye mean? I've thought of it, I tell you!'

'*Thought* of it, have you?' rejoins Mulligatawney, with a grim smile; 'then at *your* time of life, Bounce, I should recommend you to confine yourself to *thinking* of it.'

'Not at all, my dear fellow,' lisps Sir Bloomer. 'Bounce, I congratulate you. Introduce me, *pray*. Is she charming? young? beautiful? graceful? Happy Bounce — lucky dog — irresistible warrior!' The General feels three inches taller, and resolves to settle the matter the instant he gets home. But Mulligatawney interposes, with his sardonic grin, 'No fool like an old one. You'll excuse me, but if you ask my advice, I'll give it you in three words, 'Do and Repent;' you'll never regret it but once—*experto crede*.' The General turns from one to the other, like the Wild Huntsman between his ghostly advisers, the Radiant Spirit on his white charger, and the Mocking Demon on his steed from Hell—he feels quite incapable of making up his mind.

'Delightful state,' says Sir Bloomer;—'Always in hot water,' growls Mulligatawney. 'Lovely woman; affectionate nurse; take care of you when you're ill,' pleads the one;—'Cross as two sticks; open carriage in an east wind; give a ball when you've got the gout,' urges the other. 'Interchange of senti-

ment; linked in rosy chains; heaven upon earth;' lisps the ancient dandy;—'Always quarrelling; Kilkenny cats; if you *must* go to the devil, go your own way, but not in double harness,' grunts the world-worn cynic: and the General turns his cob's head, and accompanies his niece home, more perplexed than ever, as is usually the case with a man when, bethinking him that 'in the multitude of counsellors there is safety,' he has been led into the hopeless labyrinth of 'talking the matter over with a few friends.'

CHAPTER XV.

Penelope and her Suitors.

RECONNOITERING—BLANCHE'S ALBUM—'SITTING HIM OUT'—CROSS-PURPOSES—A SMITTEN DANDY—HAIR-BLOWER IN LONDON—THE TRUE-BLUE KAFFIRS—WETTING A PLANT—GOOD ADVICE—A CURE FOR LOW SPIRITS—THE REAL GLASS SLIPPERS.

'LOOK who it is, Rosine!' exclaimed Blanche, as her maid rushed to the window of her dressing-room, commanding as it did a view of Grosvenor-square, and a peep at every visitor who came to that front door, which was even now reverberating from a knock applied by no feeble hand.

'Il n'y a pas de voiture, Mademoiselle,' replied Rosine; 'ce n'est qu'un monsieur à pied—mais il n'est pas mal, lui, je trouve.' The latter observation escaped Rosine more as a private reflection of her own, than a remark for her lady's ear, and was indeed no more than due to the general appearance of Frank Hardingstone, as he stood at that well-known door, his strong heart beating like a girl's.

'Run, and say I'll be down directly, Rosine, if it's any one for me,' said Blanche, her colour rising, as she thought *who* it was likely to be, and wondered why he had not called before, and determined to

punish him, and keep him waiting, and be very cold when they *did* meet, and so shew him that she did not choose to be accountable to *him* indeed for her actions, and would ride in the Park with whom she pleased, and was utterly indifferent to his good opinion, and independent of him altogether—and thus resolving, our consistent young lady looked at herself in the glass, and was pleased to see that her eyes were bright and her hair smooth, and that she should confront Frank armed with her best looks, which proves how entirely careless she was of that gentleman's admiration.

In the meantime the object of all this severity was kicking his heels in the spacious drawing-room appropriated to morning visitors, whither he had been conducted by an elaborately-polite footman, who after informing him that 'the General was *hout*, and Miss Kettering at *'ome,'* made a precipitate retreat, leaving him to his own thoughts and the contemplation of his well-dressed figure in some half-dozen mirrors. Frank soon tired of these resources, and found himself driven to the table for amusement, where he found the usual litter of handsomely bound books, costly work-boxes, grotesque paper-cutters, and miniatures painted in all the glowing colours of the rainbow. He was nervous (for him)—very nervous, and though he took one up after another, and examined them most minutely, he would have been sorely puzzled to explain what he was looking at.

Nor did a contemplation of Blanche's portrait in ivory serve to restore the visitor's composure, albeit representing that young lady smiling with all her might under a heavy crimson curtain. He shut up the case with a savage *snap*, and replaced it with a bitter sneer. But if the representation of Miss Kettering's outward semblance met with so little favour, neither did her album, which we may presume was the index of her mind, seem to afford greater satisfaction to this discontented young man. It opened unfortunately at some lines by Lord Mount Helicon, 'addressed to B—— on being asked whether the disfigurement of the object was not a certain cure for any man's love,' and was entitled—

THE FADED FLOWER.

I spied a sweet Moss-rose my garden adorning,
  With a blush at her core like the pink of a shell,
And I wrung from her petals the dew-drop of morning,
  And gathered her gently and tended her well.
For the bee and the butterfly round her were humming
  To whisper their flattering love-tale and fly,
And too surely I knew that the season was coming,
  When the flower must fade and the insect must die.

So deep in the shade of my chamber I brought her,
  And sheltered her safe from the wind and the sun,
And cared for her kindly and dipped her in water,
  And vowed to preserve her when summer was done.
Though dark was my dwelling, this darling of Flora
  Like a spirit of beauty, enlivened the gloom,
Yet more than I loved her, I seemed to adore her,
  Less fond of her fragrance than proud of her bloom.

But long ere the brightness of summer was shaded,
  My moss-rose was drooping and withering away;
Her perfume had perished, her freshness had faded—
  The very condition of life is decay.
And now, more than ever, I cherish and prize her,
  For love shall not falter though beauty depart;
And far dearer to me because others despise her,
  That Moss-rose, all withered, lies next to my heart.

'Rubbish,' growled Frank; that any man in his senses should write such infernal nonsense, and then have the face to put his name to it. *His* moss-rose indeed! and this is what women like. These are the coxcombs they prefer to a plain, sensible, true-hearted gentleman — put wisdom, talent, courage, faith and truth in one scale, and weigh them against a soft voice, a large pair of whiskers, and varnished boots in the other—why the boots have it twenty to one! and it is for this thoughtless, ungrateful, unfeeling, volatile, ill-judging sex, that we are all prepared to go through fire and water, sacrifice friends, country, fame, position, honour itself. Blanche! Blanche is as bad as the rest, but *I* at least will no longer be such a fool. I have no idea of becoming a *pis-aller*—a substitute—a stop-gap—if this hair-brained peer should change his mind, and that warlike *roué* find some one he likes better than Miss Kettering. Oh, Blanche! Blanche! that I had never known you, or having known you, could rate you at your real value, and give you up without a struggle!'

'How do you do, Miss Kettering? What a beautiful day!' Only the last sentence of the foregoing, be it observed was spoken aloud; Frank had just schooled himself to the point of separation for ever, when the door opened and Blanche entered, looking so exactly as she used, with the same graceful gestures and the same kind smile, that her empire was, for the moment, completely re-established, and although she, too, had meant to be very reserved and very distant, she could not forbear greeting her old admirer with all the cordiality of bygone days. These young people loved one another very much; each would have given the world to pour forth hopes, and fears, and misgivings, and vows, and reproaches, and pardons, into the other's ear, but the lip *will* tremble when the heart is full, and they got no further than 'How do you do?' and 'What a beautiful day!' Blanche was the first to regain her composure, as is generally the case with a lady, perhaps from her being more habituated to losing it—perhaps from her whole training being one of readier hypocrisy than that of man. Be this how it may, the deeper water, when stirred, is longer in smoothing its ruffled surface; and whilst the lover's lip shook, and his heart beat, the girl's voice was steady and tranquil, though she dared not trust herself, save with the common-place topics and everyday conversation of society. They tried Chiswick—the new singer—the drawing-room—Lady Ormolu's ball—the opera—

and the Park; this last was tender ground, and Blanche coloured to the temples when Frank hesitated and stammered out (so different from his usual manly, open address) that he '*thought* he had seen her yesterday, and her horse was looking remarkably well. By the by, was she not riding with——'

'Major D'Orville,' announced the polite footman, with the utmost stateliness; and our handsome hussar made his appearance, and paid his respects to Miss Kettering in his usual self-possessed and dignified manner, contrasting favourably with poor Frank's obvious embarrassment and annoyance, now heightened by the intrusion of so unwelcome a visitor at such an unlucky moment. A few seconds more might have produced an explanation, a reconciliation—possibly a scene—but that cursed door-knocker could not be still, even for so short a space; and Mr. Hardingstone was once more at a deadlock.

And now began another game at cross-purposes, which, though not uncommon amongst ladies and gentlemen who are of opinion that 'two form pleasanter company than three,' is, nevertheless, a dull and dreary recreation when persisted in for any length of time. It is termed 'sitting each other out,' and was now performed by Frank Hardingstone and the Major in its highest perfection. But here again the man of war had an advantage over the civilian. Besides the occupation afforded him by

his moustaches, of which ornaments even D'Orville acknowledged the value in a case like the present, he was thoroughly at his ease, and, consequently, good-humoured, lively, and agreeable; whereas Frank was restless, pre-occupied, almost morose. He had never before appeared to such disadvantage in Blanche's eyes. But if he hoped to obtain her ear by dint of patient assiduity, and an obvious intention to remain where he was till dinner-time, he must have been grievously disappointed, for again a thundering knock shook the house to its foundations, and 'Lord Mount Helicon' was announced by the polite footman, with an extra flourish, on account of the title. His lordship greeted Blanche with the greatest *empressement*, nodded to the gentlemen with the most hearty cordiality, as though rivalry was a word unknown in his vocabulary, and settled himself in an arm-chair by the lady's side, with a good-natured assurance peculiarly his own.

'Do you ride to-day, Miss Kettering?' said he, with the most matter-of-course air. 'I promised the General to show him my famous pony, so I have ordered 'Tric-trac' (that's his name) to be here at five—perhaps you 'll allow me to accompany you.'

Frank looked intensely disgusted: he had brought no hacks to town, and if he had, would never have proposed to ride with his ladye-love in such an off-hand way. Even the Major opened his eyes wider than usual, and gave an extra twirl to his moustaches;

but 'Mount' rattled on, nothing daunted, 'We shall have Lacquers here directly. I met him as I drove up Bond-street, coming out of Storr and Mortimer's, and I taxed him on the spot with the accusation that he was going to be married. He couldn't stand the test, Miss Kettering; he blushed, actually blushed—and tried to get rid of me by an assurance that he was very busy, and that we should meet again in the Park. But I know better; he's coming here, I can take my oath of it. His hair is curled in five rows, and he never wears more than four, save for particular occasions. He is very fidgetty about his 'chevelure,' '*his* chevalier' he calls it; and went the other night to hear *The Barbiere*, as he himself acknowledged, 'to get a wrinkle, you know, about dressing, and shaving, and all that.'

Blanche laughed in spite of herself;' and Frank, seizing his hat in ill-concealed vexation, bade her a hurried farewell, and rushed out of the house, just as the redoubtable Lacquers made his appearance, 'got up' as Lord Mount Helicon had observed, with the greatest magnificence, and fully resolved in his own mind to push the siege briskly with the heiress, and at least to lose no ground in her good graces for want of attention to the duties, or rather, we should say, the pleasures of the toilette.

Poor Frank was very wretched, as he stalked down the sunshiny street, and almost vowed he would never enter *that* house again. He felt a void at his heart

that quite startled him. He had no idea he was so far gone. For a time he believed himself really and utterly miserable; nor did the reflection that such a feeling was a bitter satire on his boasted strength of mind, on that intellectual training of which he was so proud, serve to administer much consolation. Like the ruined gamester, who—

'Damned the poor link-boy that called him a duke,'

Frank felt inclined to quarrel with the world in general, and buttoned his coat with savage energy, when the poor crossing-sweeper held out her toil-worn hand for a penny. He relented too, and gave her money, and felt ashamed that he should have thought for an instant of visiting his own afflictions on that hard-working creature, the more so as a sailor-looking man in front of him had evidently given a trifle to the poor, industrious woman.

Frank thought he recognised those broad shoulders, that large, loose frame and rolling gait; in another moment he was alongside Hairblower, and clasping the delighted seaman's hand with a warmth and cordiality by no means less vigorously returned.

'The last person as I ever expected to come across hereaway,' said Hairblower, his broad, honest face wrinkling with pleasure. 'I little thought when I came cruizing about this here place as I should fall in with friends at every corner, and pretty friends they 've showed theirselves, some on 'em.'

As the seaman spoke these last words in bitter and desponding tones, Frank remarked that he looked pale and haggard; and though his clear eye and good-humoured smile were the same as ever, he had lost the well-to-do air and jovial manner which used to distinguish him at St. Swithin's. Frank asked if there was anything wrong: 'You know I 'm an old friend, Hairblower; I can see something has happened, can I assist you? At any rate, tell me what is the matter.'

The tears stood in Hairblower's eyes, and again he wrung Frank's hand, with a grasp like a vice, and his voice came hoarse and thick as he replied' 'God bless you, Mr. Hardingstone, you 're a real gentleman, *you* are, and though I 'm a plain man and poor —*poor*, I haven't five shillings left in the world—you think it no shame to be seen walking and talking with the likes of me in the broad daylight, and that's what I call *manly*, sir: no more didn't Master Charlie —poor lad! he 's far enough now; many's the time he 's said to me, 'Hairblower,' says he—but that 's neither here nor there. Well, Mr. Hardingstone, things has gone cross with me now for a goodish bit: the fishin's not what it used to be, nor the place neither. Bless ye, I 've seen the day when I could take and put my ten-pound note on the old table, at home, ay, and another to the back of that! but times is altered now, betterer for some, worserer for others. I 've have had my share, mayhap, but I 've

been driftin' to leeward a long while back, and I've had a deal of way to fetch up. Well, sir, I'm pretty stiff and strong yet, and the Lord's above all, so I thought I might just get things together a bit, and streak up here to London town, and so look out for a berth in some of these here ships a goin' foreign. I've neither chick nor child to care for me at home, and I reckoned as a voyage wouldn't hurt me no worse now than five-and-twenty years ago. Well, sir, to make a long story short, I got a bit o' money together, as much as would buy me an outfit and chest, and such like, for I meant to ship as second mate at the worst, and I always liked to be respectable: and when I'd got that I'd got *all*, but I didn't owe no man a farthing, and so would be ready to clear out with a clean breast. Lord, sir, what a place this here town is for sights; go where I would there was something to be seen. To be sure I hadn't many shillings to throw away, and I just looked straight afore me, and I never so much as winked at the mammon horse, nor the stuffed sea-serpent, nor the biggest man in Europe, nor the fattest woman, nor the world turned upside down, nor none on 'em, till I was brought up all standing by a board, where they offered to show me some True-blue Kaffirs, all alive and as dark as natur'. Well, sir, I knew a very respectable Kaffir family once, on the coast of Africa, where we used to land a boat's crew, at odd times, for fresh water and such like, and, thinks I, I'll just

go and have a peep at the True-blues, and see if they remind me of my old friends. There they was, Mr. Hardingstone, sure enough. Old True-blue was a stampin', and yelling, and hissin', and makin' of such a disturbance as he never got leave to do at home, and his wives, five or six on 'em, was yowlin', and cryin', and kickin' up the devil's delight, as *I* never see them, when they was livin' decently in the bush. Well, sir, when the True-blues held on for a while, to have their beer, the company was invited to go and inspect 'em closer, and pat 'em, and feel 'em, and I made no doubt they was Ingines myself, when I got the wind of 'em; but just as I was castin' about, to see if I could fish up an odd word or two of their language, only to be civil you know, to strangers, True-blue's wife—she comes up and lays hold of me by the whiskers, and grins, and smiles, and points, and pulls at 'em, like grim Death; and old True-blue himself—he comes up and has a haul, too, and grins, and chatters, and looks desperation fierce: and so they holds me amongst 'em. You see, Mr. Hardingstone, they 're not used to beards, 'cos it 's not their natur', nor whiskers neither. Well, I looked uncommon foolish, and the company all began to laugh, and I heard a voice behind me say, 'Why it 's Hairblower!' and I turns round, and who should I see but an old friend of mine, by name Blacke, as was a lawyer's clerk at St. Swithin's: *friend* is he,' said Hairblower, ground his teeth, and doubled a most formidable-

looking fist, as he added, 'if ever I catch him I'll give him his allowance;—*friend*, indeed, I'll teach him who his friends are.'

For a while the seaman's indignation was too strong for him, and he walked on several paces without saying a word, forgetful apparently of his companion and his situation, and all but his anger at the unworthy treatment to which he had been subjected. As he cooled down, however, he resumed. 'Well, Mr. Hardingstone, in course we went out together, and we turned into a Tom-and-Jerry shop to have some beer, and spin a bit of a yarn about old times; and I asked him about his missus, and he remembered all the ins-and-outs of the old place, and I liked to talk to him all about it, 'specially as I shouldn't see it again for a goodish while; and we had some grog and pipes, and was quite comfortable. After a time, a chap came in, a big chap, in a white jacket and ankle-boots, and he took no notice of us, but began braggin' and chaffin' about his strength, and his liftin' weights, and playin' skittles and such like; and Blacke whispers to me, 'Hairblower,' says he, 'you're a strong chap, put this noisy fellow down a bit, and perhaps he'll keep quiet.' Well, he kept eggin' of me on, and at last I makes a match, stupid like, to lift a heavier weight than the noisy one. So, the landlord, he brings in half-a-dozen fifty-sixes, and I beats him all to rubbish. So he was somethin' mad at that, and offered to play me at skittles

for five pounds, or ten pounds, or twenty pounds; and I said it was foolish to risk so much money for amusement, but I 'd play him for a sovereign, 'cos ye see my blood was up, and I wasn't a-goin' to knock under to such a land-lubber as this here. 'Sovereign!' says he, 'I don't believe as you 've got a sovereign,' and he pulls out a handful of notes and silver, and such-like, and, says he, 'Afore I stake,' says he, 'let me see my money covered; it 's my belief this here's a plant.' 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself,' says Blacke, the first time he spoke to him; *my* friend 's a gen'l'man, and can show *the ready* against all you 've got—coin for coin, and shillin' for shillin'.' With that I pulls out my purse and counts my money down on the table—eleven golden sovereigns and a five-pound note—so we gets to skittles quite contented, and I puts my purse back in my jacket-pocket and gives it Blacke to hold. Well, sir, I polished him off at skittles too, and he paid his wager up like a man, and treated us all round, and behaved quite sociable-like, so we got drinkin' again —him and me and Blacke—at the same table. After a time my head began to get bad—I never felt it so afore—and the mixture I was drinkin' of—gin it was, and beer—seemed to taste queerish somehow, but I thought nothing of it, and drank on, thinking as the stuff would soon settle itself, but it didn't though; for in a little while the room and the tables and the chairs seemed to be heavin' and turnin' and pitchin',

and I felt all manner of ways myself, and broke out into a cold sweat, and says I, 'I think I'll go out into the fresh air a bit, for I'm taken bad,' says I, 'someway; but don't ye disturb yourselves, I'll soon be back again.' So Blacke he helped me out, and directly I got into the yard where the skittles was, I see the place all green-like, and after that I remember no more till I found myself on the landlord's bed upstairs; and by that time it was ten o'clock at night, so I up and asked what was become of my friend; and the landlord, he told me both the gentlemen was gone, and that they had said I didn't ought to be disturbed, and that I was *often so;* and they was goin' away without payin' the score, but the landlord was a deep cove, and he wouldn't let them off without settling, so they paid it all, and so walked away. Well, I got my jacket and walked away, too; and all in a moment I thought I'd *heard* of such things, and I'd feel in my pocket to see if my purse was safe. There was *the purse,* sure enough, but the *money* was gone, every groat of it,—there wasn't a rap left to jingle for luck, Mr. Hardingstone. Well, sir, it all came across me at once—I'd been hocussed, no doubt—they drugged my lush, the thieves, and then they robbed me—and my old friend, Tom Blacke, as I've known from a boy, was at the bottom of it. The landlord he thought so, too; but he was in a terrible takin' himself for the character of his house, and he gave me half-a-crown,

and begged I 'd say nothin' about it; and that half-crown, all but sixpence I gave just now to a poor creatur' that wanted it more nor me, is the whole of my fortun', Mr. Hardingstone. But it 's not the money I care for,—thank God, I can work and get more,—it 's the meanness of a man I once thought well of. That 's where it is, sir, and I can't bear it. Blacke by name, and black by natur'—he must be a rank bad 'un, and I 'm ashamed of him, that I am!'

Hairblower got better after making a clean breast of it. He had no friends in London; none to confide in, none to advise him; and his chance meeting with Frank Hardingstone 'did him a sight of good,' as he said himself, and 'made a man of him again.' Nor was the rencontre less beneficial to Frank. When a man is suffering from that imaginary malady (none the less painful for being imaginary) which originates in the frown of a pretty girl, there is nothing so likely to do him good as a stirring piece of real business, to which he must devote all his energies of body and mind. Byron recommends a sea voyage, with its accompanying sea-sickness; the latter he esteems a more perfect cure than 'purgatives,' or 'the application of hot towels.' Not but that these unromantic remedies may be extremely effective; but, failing such counter-irritants, we question whether a visit to Scotland-yard, and an interview with those courteous and matter-of-fact

gentlemen, who preside over our well-organized metropolitan police force, be not as good a method of cauterizing the wound as any other, more particularly when such a visit is undertaken for the express purpose of seeing a friend through an awkward scrape. Frank soon had Hairblower into a cab, and off on his way to the head-quarters of that detective justice which is any thing but blind; where the seaman, having again told his unvarnished tale, and been assured that his grievances should meet with the promptest attention, was dismissed, not a little comforted, though at the same time most completely puzzled. Frank's assistance to his humble friend, however, did not stop here. He *liked* Hairblower, partly, it must be confessed, because the seaman was so strong and plucky, and possessed such physical advantages as no man despises, though he who shares them himself often rates them higher than the rest of the world. Frank enjoyed associating with men of all sorts, but more especially he relished the society of such daring spirits as are accustomed to look death in the face day by day, in the earning of their very subsistence, and to trust their own cool heads and strong hands amidst all the turmoil of the deep, 'blow high, blow low.' Many a wild night had he been out in the Channel with his sailor friend, when an inch or two more canvas, or a moment's neglect of the helm, would have made the reckless couple food for those fishes after which they

laboured so assiduously; and our two friends, for so we must call them, notwithstanding their difference of station, had learned to depend on each other, and to admire reciprocally the frame that labour could not subdue, the nerves that danger could not daunt. So now the gentleman talked the sailor's affairs over with him as if he had been a brother. He gave him the best advice in his power; he recommended him to go back to St. Swithin's, to prosecute the fishing trade once more, and with the same delicacy which he would have thought due to one of his own rank, he offered to *lend* him such a sum of money as would enable him to begin the world again, and expressly stipulated that he should be repaid by instalments varying with the price of mackerel and the success of the fishing.

'If once you get your head above water, I know you can swim like a duck,' said Frank, grasping the honest fellow's hand, 'so say no more about it. We'll have rare times in the yawl before the summer's quite done with; and till then, God bless you, old friend, and good luck to you!'

As Hairblower himself expressed it, 'you might have knocked him down with a feather.'

How different the world looked to Frank when he parted with his old companion, from what it had seemed some few hours before, as he left the great house in Grosvenor-square. There is an infallible receipt for lowness of spirits, nervousness, causeless

misery, and mental irritation, which beats all Dr. Willis's restorative nostrums, and emancipates the sufferer more rapidly than even the famous 'Ha! ha! Cured in an instant!' remedy! When oppressed with ennui, the poet says,

> Throw but a stone, the giant dies!

and so, when the bright sky above seems leaden to your eyes, when the song of birds, the prattle of children, or the gush of waters fall dully upon your ear, when the outward world is all vanity of vanities, and existence seems a burden, and, as Thackeray says, 'Life is a mistake'—go and do a kindly action, no matter how or where, or to whom—but at any sacrifice, at any inconvenience, go and do it—and take an old man's word for it, you will not repent. Straightway the fairy comes down the kitchen chimney, and touches your whole being with her wand. Straightway the sun bursts out with a brilliant smile, the birds take up a joyous carol, the children's voices are like the morning hymn of a seraph choir, and the babbling of the stream woos your entranced ear with the silver notes of Nature's own melody. Those are now steeds from Araby which seemed but rats and mice an hour or two ago. That is a glittering equipage which you had scouted as a huge unsightly pumpkin. You yourself, no longer crouching in dust and ashes, start upright, with your face to heaven, attired in the only robe that preserves eternal freshness, the only garment you shall take away with

you when you have done with all the rest—the web of charity, that cloak which covers a multitude of sins. You have, besides, this advantage over Cinderella—that whereas her glass slippers and corresponding splendour must be laid aside before midnight, your enchantment shall outlast the morrow; your fairy's wand can reach from earth to heaven, your kindly action is entered in a book from which there is no erasure, whereof the pages shall be read before men and angels, and shall endure from everlasting to everlasting.

CHAPTER XVI.

Forgery.

OUR HUMBLE ACQUAINTANCES — THE SCRATCH OF A PEN—A SCOUT'S INFORMATION—THE MAJOR'S MEDITIONS, NOT FANCY FREE.

IN the meantime, whilst the higher characters of our drama are fluttering their gaudy hour in the bright sunshine of fashionable life; whilst the General, and Blanche, and Mary, and Mount Helicon, and D'Orville, and Lacquers, and all of that class, are driving, and dining, and dressing, and flirting, and otherwise improving their time, grim Want is eating into the very existence of some amongst our humbler friends, and Vice, too often the handmaid of Penury, is shedding her poison even on the scanty morsel they wrest from the very jaws of danger and detection.

Tom Blacke, as we have already seen, has overleapt the narrow boundary which separates dissipation from crime; and poor Gingham knows too well that opportunity alone is wanting to confer on him a notoriety infamous as that which is boasted of by his more daring associates. He is out now at all hours, chiefly, however, during the night, and obtains

supplies of money for which she cannot account, and about which she has been taught it is better not to question him. He drinks, too, with more circumspection than was his wont, and has dreadful fits of despondency, during which he trembles like a child, and from which nothing seems to arouse him save the prattle of his infant. He is very diligent, too, in making inquiries as to the sailing of divers ships for the United States; and, being a sharp fellow, has acquainted himself thoroughly with the geography of that country, and the amount of capital requisite to enable a man to set up for himself under the star-spangled banner. He has already hinted to his wife that if he could but get hold of a little money, he should certainly emigrate; and by dint of talking the matter over, Gingham, although she has a dreadful horror of the sea, contracted at St. Swithin's, is not entirely unfavourable to the plan. Poor woman! she has not much to regret in leaving England. Let us take a peep at their establishment in the mews, as they sit by the light of a solitary tallow candle, the mother stitching as usual, though her eyes often fill with tears, whilst ever and anon she glances cautiously towards the cradle, to see if the child is asleep, and listening to its heavy, regular breathing, applies herself to the needle more diligently than before. This is the hour at which Tom usually goes out; but to-night he shows no signs of departure, sitting moodily with his chair resting against the wall, and his eyes

fixed on vacancy. At length he rouses himself with an effort, and bids Rachel make him some tea.

'I 'm glad you 're not going out to-night, Tom,' says his wife; 'I feel poorly, somehow, and it 's lonesome when you 're away for long.'

'I 'd never go out o' nights, lass,' replies Tom—'never, if I wasn't drove to it. But what 's a man to do?—this isn't a country for a poor man to live in—there 's no liberty here. Ah, Rachel, you 're made for something better than this; stitching away day after day, and not a gown or a bonnet fit to put on. You 're losing your looks too—you that used to be so genteel every way.' Mrs. Blacke smiles through her tears; he has not spoken to her so kindly for many a long day. 'There 's a country we might go to,' he adds, looking sideways at her, to watch the effect of his arguments, 'where a man as is a man, and knows his right hand from his left, need'nt want a good house to cover him, nor good clothes to his back. We 'd be there in six weeks at the farthest—what 's that—why it 's nothing; and the child all the better for the sea air. There 's a ship to start next Thursday, first class, and all regular. In two months from this day, we might be in America; and they don't *keep* a man down there, because he *is* down. Rachel, I 'd like to see you dressed as you used to be; I 'd like to bring up the little one to be as good as its parents, at least. I 'd like to be there, now; why, the dollars come in by handfuls, and silk 's as cheap as calico.'

How could woman resist such an El Dorado? How could such an inducement fail to have its due weight? His wife feels that she could start forthwith, but there is one insuperable difficulty, and she rejoins—

'Ah, that's all very well, Tom, and we might get our heads above water over there, it's likely enough. But how are we to get to America?—people can't travel, nor do anything else, without money; and where is it to come from?'

'*You know,*' replied Tom, with a meaning smile on his pale, anxious face; and while he speaks, the clock of a neighbouring church strikes ten.

'Any way but *that,* Tom,' says his wife with a shudder. 'I'd do anything, and bear anything for you; but not *that,* Tom—not *that,* as you've a soul to be saved!'

'It must be that way, or no way at all, missis,' Tom hisses between his teeth, keeping down his anger and a rising oath with a strong effort. 'I've done all *I* can; it's time for *you* to take your share. Why, look ye here, Rachel; a hundred pound's a vast of money—a hundred pounds is five hundred dollars. Oh, I'm not going blindly to work, you may depend. If we could begin life with half that, over the water, it would be the making of us. I'd leave off drinking—so help me Heaven, I would!—take the pledge, and work like a new one. You'd have a house of your own, Rachel, instead of such a

dog-hole as this; and I'd like to see one of them that would take the shine out of my wife on Sundays, when she was tidied up and dressed. Then we'd put the little one to school, when she's old enough, and we'd keep ourselves respectable, and attend to business, and be a sight happier than we've ever been in this miserable country. And all just for the scratch of a pen; Rachel, d'ye think I'd refuse *you* a trifle like that, if you was to ask me?'

'Oh, Tom, I never could do it,' says his wife; 'good never would come of such a sin as that.'

'Well, Rachel,' rejoins her husband, 'there's some men would make ye.—Well, you needn't draw up so; I'm not going to come it so strong as all that. Let's talk it over peaceably, any way. And first, where's the harm? There's Master Charlie, if ever he comes back from the wars, isn't he to marry Miss Blanche? And so it's six to one, and half-a-dozen to the other. And what's a hundred pounds out of all their thousands? Besides, did'nt the old lady mean to leave you as much as that? and didn't you deserve it? And if she'd lived, wouldn't she have signed her own name; and where's the harm of your doing it for her? You can write like your old mistress, Rachel,' adds the tempter, with a ghastly smile; 'there's pen and ink yonder on the mantelpiece. Come!' Rachel wavers; but education and good principles are still too strong within her, and

she assumes an air of resolution she does not feel, as she takes up her work, and replies—

'Never, Tom, never!—not if you was to go down upon your bended knees. Oh, Tom, Tom, don't ask me, and don't look at me so, Tom. I've been a good wife to you; don't ask me to do such a thing, Tom, don't.'

Her husband pauses for a moment, as though nerving himself for a strong effort, and answers, speaking every word distinctly, and as if in acute physical pain—

'Then it must come out, wife; you must know it all, sooner or later; and why not now? Rachel, *I'm wanted*—they're looking for me, the bloodhounds—it's my belief they were after me this very morning. If I don't cross the seas on my own account, the beaks will send me fast enough on theirs.'

'Oh Tom, Tom, what have you done?' interrupts his wife, clasping her hands, and straining her eyes, dilated with horror, upon her husband's working features. 'It's not——, Tom, I can't bring myself to say it. You haven't lifted your hand against another?'

'No, no, Rachel,' says he; 'not so bad as that, lass, not so bad as that; but it's fourteen years, anyhow, if they bring it home to me. *I* must cut and run, whatever happens. Now, there's some men would be off single-handed, and never stop to say good-bye; but I'm not one of that sort. I couldn't

bear to leave you and the child; and I won't, neither. Rachel, do you mind the time when we sat on the beach at St. Swithin's, and what you said to me there? Well, dear, that 's past and gone, now; but you 're not changed, anyhow. Will you do it, Rachel, for *my sake?*'

The poor woman wavers more and more; she is white as a sheet, and the perspiration stands in beads on her lip and forehead. Tom produces a pen and ink, and a certain document we recognise as having lain in Mrs. Kettering's writing-case the night she died at St. Swithin's. But his wife shrinks from the pen as from a serpent, and he has to force it into her fingers.

'It 's the *last time*, Rachel,' he pleads, 'I 'll never ask you to do such a thing again. It 's the *last time* I 'll do wrong myself, as I stand here. It 's but a word, and it will be the saving of us both; ay, and the little one yonder, too—think what she 'd be growing up to, in such a place as this. You sign, dear, and I 'll witness—I can write my own name, and my old master's, too; he 's dead and gone now, but he didn't teach me law for nothing.'

She does not hear him; her whole being is absorbed in the contemplation of her crime. But she *does it*. Pale, scared, and breathless, she leans over the coarse deal table; and though the dazzling sheet is dancing beneath her eyes, and her hands are icy cold, and her frame shakes like a leaf, every letter

grows distinct and careful beneath her fingers, and burns itself into her brain, the very fac-simile of her old mistress's signature. The clock strikes eleven; and at the first clang, she starts with the throb of newly-awakened guilt, and drops the pen from her failing grasp. But the deed is done. From that hour, the once respectable woman is a felon; and she feels it. To-morrow morning, for the first time in her life, she will awake with the leaden, stupifying, soul-oppressive weight of actual law-breaking guilt; and from this night, she will never sleep as soundly again.

* * * * *

Tom prided himself, above all things, on being 'up to trap,' as he expressed it. He thought his own cunning more than a match for all the difficulties of his situation and the vengeance of the law. He was considered a 'knowing hand' amongst his disreputable associates, and had the character of a man who was safe to keep his own neck out of the noose, whatever became of his comrades. But, though a bold schemer, he was a very coward in action, and his nerves were now so shattered by hard drinking that he was almost afraid of his own shadow. A bad conscience is always the worst of company, but to a man not naturally brave, it is a continual bugbear—a fiend that dogs his victim, sleeping or waking—sits with him at his meals, pledges him in his cups, and grins at him on his pillow. Tom possessed this

familiar to perfection. Like all 'suspected persons,' he conceived his movements to be of more importance in the eyes of Justice than they really were, and although the 'hocussing' and robbery of Hairblower richly deserved condign punishment, he was suffering from causeless alarm when he informed his wife that he was 'wanted' on that score. The truth is, the police were on a wrong scent. The landlord either could not, or would not, give them any actual information as to his guests—he 'remembered the circumstance of the gentleman being taken ill—did not know the parties with whom he was drinking—thought they were friends of the gentleman—the parties paid for their liquor, and went away, leaving the other party asleep—it was no business of his—had never been in trouble before, he could swear—commiserated the party who had got drunk, and gave him half-a-crown out of sheer humanity—had known what it was to want half-a-crown himself, and to get drunk too—was doing an honest business now, and thought publicans could not be too particular.' So the blue-coated myrmidons of Scotland-yard got but little information from Boniface; and for once were completely at fault, more especially as Hairblower, *more suorum*, did not know the number of the note he had lost—could swear it was for five pounds, but was not quite clear as to its being Bank of England. Under these circumstances Tom, had he only known it, might have walked abroad in the light of day,

and put in immediate practice any schemes he had on hand. Instead of this, he chose to lie in hiding, and only emerged in the evening to take his indispensable stimulants at one or other of the low haunts which he frequented. Man cannot live without society; the most depraved must have friends, or such as they deem friends, on whom to repose their trust; and Tom Blacke, in an unguarded moment of gin and confidence, let out the whole story of the Will (though he was cunning enough to omit the forgery), and boasted what an engine he could make of it to extort money from Miss Blanche's guardian, and how he was certain of getting *at least* a hundred pounds, and detailed the proposed plan of emigration, and, in short, explained the general tenor of his future life and present fortunes to Mr. Fibbes; of all which matters, though by no means a gentleman of acute perception, that worthy did by degrees arrive at the meaning, quickening his intellects the while with many pipes and a prodigious quantity of beer. Now, Mr. Fibbes had been concerned in his earlier youth in a business from which his size and his stupidity had gradually emancipated him, but which, compared with his present trade, might almost be called an innocent and virtuous calling. It consisted in ascertaining by diligent and clandestine vigilance the relative merits of race-horses as demonstrated by their *private trials*, and is termed in the vernacular 'touting.' What may be the *moral* guilt of such for-

bidden peeps, we are not sufficient casuists to explain, but it is scarcely considered amongst the least particular classes a *respectable* way of obtaining a livelihood. Nor did the association gain additional lustre from the adhesion of Mr. Fibbes, who, until his great frame grew too large to be concealed, and his hard head too obtuse to make the best of his information, was the most presuming, as he was least to be depended on, of the whole brotherhood. In this capacity, however, he had made the acquaintance of Major D'Orville, a man who liked to have tools ready to his hand for whatever purpose he had in view; and Mr. Fibbes had been careful to keep up the connexion, by respectful bows, whenever they met in the streets, or at races, or such gatherings as bring together sporting gentlemen of all ranks. On these occasions Mr. Fibbes would make tender inquiries after the Major's health, and his luck on the turf, and the well-being of his white charger, and sundry other ingratiating topics; or would inform him confidentially of certain rats in his possession which could be produced at half-an-hour's notice, without fail—of terriers, almost imperceptible in weight, which could be backed to kill the rats aforesaid in an incredibly short space of time—of toy-dogs surpassing in beauty and discreet in behaviour—or of the pending match against time which 'The Copenhagen Antelope' meant to *square* by running *a cross*, or, in other words, losing it on purpose to play booty.

Primed with such conversation, he amused the Major, who liked to study human nature in all its phases, and they seldom met without a lengthened dialogue and the transfer of a half-crown from the warrior's pocket into Mr. Fibbes' hand; the latter accordingly lost no opportunity of coming across his generous patron.

Now, Mr. Fibbes had observed, by hanging about Grosvenor-square and making use of his early education, that Major D'Orville was a constant visitant at a certain house in that locality; indeed, on more than one occasion he had held the white horse at the very door which was honoured by the egress and ingress of Blanche Kettering herself. We may be sure he lost no time in discovering the name of the owner, and mastering such particulars of her fortune, position, general habits and appearance, as were attainable through the all-powerful influence of beer; so when Tom Blacke made his ill-advised confidences to his boon companion, omitting neither names, facts, nor dates, Mr. Fibbes, who, to use his own words, was 'not such a fool as he looked,' put *that* and *that* together quite satisfactorily enough; to be sure he had some information well worth a good round douceur, for the ear of his friend the Major. And he way-laid him in consequence, the first sunshiny afternoon on which, according to his wont, D'Orville appeared in the neighbourhood of his ladye-love's domicile.

'Want yer horse held, Major?' said he, leaning his huge, dirty hand on the white charger's mane. 'Haven't seen your Honour since we won so cleverly at Hampton—no offence, Major!'

'None whatever, my good fellow,' said the Major, who, by the way, was never in a hurry, though few men loved going *fast* better; 'none whatever; but I'm busy now, I've no time to stop. Good day to you.'

'Well, but Major, see,' pleaded Mr. Fibbs, still smoothing the white horse's mane, 'I've got something at my place you *would* like to look at—she's a *real* beauty, she is—I refused five sovereigns for her this blessed mornin', for I said, says I, no, says I, not till the Major has seen her, 'cause she *is* a rare one—not that you care for such in a general way, Major, but if once you clapped eyes on 'Jessie' you'd never rest till you got her down at the Barracks. I never see such a one.'

'Such a what?' inquired D'Orville, gradually waxing curious about such manifold perfections.

'Why, such an out-an'-outer,' retorted Mr. Fibbes, half angrily; 'none of your *brindles*—I can't abide a brindle—they may be good, but they look so *wulgar*. No, no, Jessie's none of your brindles.'

'Well, but *what* is she, my good fellow?' said the Major; 'I can't stay here all day.'

'*Bul*,' replied Mr. Fibbes, throwing into the monosyllable an expression of mingled anger and contempt,

which, having given the Major sufficient time to digest, he followed up by the real topic on which he was anxious to enlarge. 'No offence, Major,' he repeated, 'but I 've got something else to say—you 'll excuse me, sir—but you've stood a friend to me, and I won't see you put upon. Major, there's a screw loose here—it's not *on the square*, you understand.'

'What do you mean?' said the Major, amused in spite of himself at the ungainly nods and winks with which Mr. Fibbes eked out his mysterious communication.

'Well, Major,' replied his informant, 'what I mean is this here. Some men would hold out in my place, and I've seen the day when my information was worth as much as my neighbours; but when I've to do with a real gent, why, I trusts to him, and he gives *what he pleases*. Now, Major, look at that there house—it's a good house, upstairs and down, fixtures and furniture all complete, I make no doubt—Major, there's *a man of straw* in that house.' Mr. Fibbes paused, having delivered himself of this oracular piece of information; but, finding his listener less interested in the discovery of the artificial stranger than he had reason to expect, he proceeded, in his own way, to clear up his metaphor. 'What I says is this—a bargain's a bargain; now the young woman as owns that house has got *the boot on the other leg*—my information 's *good*, Major, you may depend on it; there's

another horse in the stable, sir—there 's a young gent as owns all the property they keep such a talk about; I wont ask ye to believe my naked word, Major (such a request, indeed, would have been superfluous); but what should you say if I was to tell you—I 've spoke to a party as has *seen the will!*'

'Why, I should say that if you have any information that is really well-authenticated I 'll pay you fairly for it, as I always have done,' replied D'Orville, unmoved, as usual, though, in his innermost heart, a tide of doubts, and hopes, and fears was swelling up, in strange tumultuous confusion.

'Well, Major,' whispered his informant, 'as far as I can learn, for I ain't no scholar, you know—but *as* far as I can learn, there 's been a will found, and by that will the young lady as owns this here house don't own it by rights, and can't keep it much longer. There 's a old gentleman as lives here, rayther a crusty old gentleman, so my mate tells *me*, and he knows *nothing*, good or bad; but it stands just as I 've said, you may depend, and instead of Miss Kettering, if that 's her name, being such a grand lady, why she's no better off than I am, and that 's *where* it is. My mate wouldn't deceive *me* no more than I 'm deceivin' you. Thank ye, Major, you always was a real gentleman, thank you, sir, and good-day to you. You wont come up and take a look at Jessie?' so saying Mr. Fibbes put his dirty hand, not quite empty, however, into his pocket, and, with a

snatch at his rough hat, and an awkward obeisance, took his departure, his linen jacket and ankle-boots fading gradually in the direction of the nearest public-house, whither he proceeded incontinently to 'wet his luck,' after the manner of his kind.

D'Orville laid the rein on his favourite's neck, and paced along at a slow thoughtful walk, the white horse wondering, doubtless, at his master's unusual fit of equestrian meditation. And what were the suitor's feelings, as he pondered over the news he had just received, the downfall of his golden castles in the air, the blow which would surely fall heavy on that bright happy girl, whom he had been endeavouring to attach to himself day by day? Did he mourn over his withered hopes of wealth and ease? did he regret the melting of the vision, and pine for the domestic future, now impossible, which he had contemplated so often of late? or did he chivalrously resolve to give his hand to a penniless bride where he had been wooing a wealthy heiress, and to love her even more in her misfortunes than he had admired her in her prosperity? Alas! far from it. Some fifteen years ago, indeed, young Gaston D'Orville would have sacrificed his all to a woman, almost to any woman, and been well pleased to throw his heart into the bargain; but fifteen years of the world have more effect on the inner than the outward man, and the boy of five-and-twenty thinks that a glory and a romance which the man who is getting

on for forty deems a folly and a bore. The Major was not prepared to give up *everything*, at least for *Blanche*, and his first sensations were those of relief, almost of satisfaction, as he thought he was again free—for of course this arrangement couldn't go on, it would be madness to talk of it now: no, he would make his bow while it was yet time; how lucky he had never positively committed himself: nobody could say *he* had behaved ill. Of course he would take proper measures to ascertain the truth of that rascal's report; and if it had foundation, why he was once again at liberty. He had his sword and his debts, but India was open to him, as it had been before, and a vision stole over him—(the hardened man of the world could scarce repress a smile at his own folly)—a vision stole over him of military distinction, active service, a return to England and—Mary Delaval. So the Major drew his reign through his fingers, pressed his good horse's sides and cantered off, but did not, *that* afternoon, pay his usual visit in Grosvenor-square.

CHAPTER XVII.

Club-Law.

A VALID EXCUSE—AN ANONYMOUS LETTER—A RECEIPT FOR ANNOYANCES—THE GENERAL ON THE PAVE—SECOND CHILDHOOD—RUNNING THE GAUNTLET—A SUIT OF CLUBS—SETTLED AT LAST—THE FRIEND IN NEED.

'WHO the deuce ever heard of 'military duty' interfering with dinner? and what's the use of being one's own commanding officer, if one can't give one-self leave—What?—read that Blanche!' We need hardly observe that it was General Bounce who spoke, as he tossed a note across the luncheon-table, to his niece, and proceeded to busy himself in his other despatches. The General was none of your dawdling half-torpid dressing-gown-and-slipper gentlemen, who consider London fit place in which to spend the greater part of the day in deshabille—not a bit of it. The General was up, shaved, and rosy, and breakfasted, and prepared to fuss through his day, every morning punctually at eight. On the one in question he had reviewed a battalion of Guards, who were at drill, in the park, utterly unconscious of their inspection by such a martinet, and had been good enough to express his disapprobation of their dress, method,

and general efficiency, to a quiet unassuming bystander, whom he had never set eyes on before, but who happened to be a peer of the realm, and whose son, indeed, commanded the very regiment under discussion. The peer was quite alarmed at the denunciations of a casual acquaintance, so fierce of demeanour and of such warlike costume, the general never stirring abroad, for these morning excursions, save in a military surtout, buttoned very tight, a stiff black stock and buckskin gloves, armed, moreover, with a bamboo walking-stick, which he brandished about with great impartiality. After his strictures on the sovereign's body-guard he proceeded into the City by a Hansom cab; there was no cab-rebellion in those days, but, nevertheless, Bounce succeeded in having a violent altercation with his driver, which resulted in that observer of human nature setting him down for a madman, and his own discomfiture, on referring the dispute to an impartial policeman. From thence he visited his stables, and instructed divers helpers belonging to the adjoining mews in the proper method of washing a carriage, a lesson received by those worthies with much covert derision. The General was by this time ready for 'tiffin' as he still called it—a meal at which, for the first time in the day, he met the ladies of his establishment, read his notes, letters, etc., and arranged with Blanche, the details of the gay life they were every day leading. That young lady, in a very pretty morning-

gown, now occupied the head of the table; Mary was upstairs with a headache—she was very subject to them, of late—yet a skilful practitioner might have guessed the malady lay elsewhere; and whilst the General, with his eyebrows rising into his very forehead, perused a dirty ill-conditioned looking missive, which seemed to afford him great astonishment, his niece glanced over her military suitor's excuse for not dining with them, in which he expressed his regret that duty and the absolute necessity of his presence in barracks would prevent his having that pleasure, but did not as usual suggest any fresh arrangements, for rides, drives, or walks, which should ensure him the charms of her society. Blanche was a little hurt and more than a little offended; yet, had she closely examined her own feelings, she would probably have been surprised to find how little she *really* cared whether he came or not. 'Well, Uncle Baldwin,' she said, with her usual merry smile, 'you and I will dine *tête-à-tête*, for I don't think poor Mrs. Delaval will be able to come down. We shall not quarrel, I fancy—shall we?' The General was dumb. His whole soul seemed absorbed in the missive which hid his face, but, judging from the red swollen forehead peeping above, indignation appeared to be the prevailing feeling inspired by its contents. It was not badly written, though in an unsteady hand, nor was it incorrectly spelt; it bore no signature and was to the following effect:—

General Bounce,

'Sir,—This from a friend.—Seeing that you would probably be averse to an exposure of family matters, in which Miss Blanche's name must necessarily appear, a well-wisher sends these few lines to warn you that *all has been discovered.* The late Mrs K.'s will has been found, in which she devises everything, with the exception of certain legacies, to C——. The writer has seen it, and knows where it is to be found. His own interests prompt him to make *everything* public, but his regard for the family would induce him to listen to terms, could he himself be guaranteed from loss. General—time is everything: to-morrow may be too late. If you should be unwilling to disturb muddy water, an advertisement to X. Y., in the second column of the *Times,* or a line addressed to P. Q., care of Mr. John Stripes, Bear and Bagpipes, corner of Goat-street, Tilers'-road, Lambeth, would meet with prompt attention. Be wise.'

We regret to state that the General's exclamation, on arriving at the conclusion of this mysterious document, was of a profane fervour, inexcusable under any provocation, and very properly amenable to a fine of five shillings by the laws of this well-regulated country. It was repeated, moreover, oftener than once; and without deigning to explain to his astonished niece the cause of his evident discomposure, was followed by his immediate departure to his own private snuggery—by the way the very worst

and darkest room in the house, whither our discomfited warrior made a tremulous retreat, banging every door after him, with a shock that caused the very window-frames to quiver again.

'Zounds! I wont believe it!—it's impossible—it's a forgery—it's a lie—it's an artifice of the devil! Why, it's written in a clerk's hand. Gad, if I thought there was a word of truth in it, I'd go to bed for a month!' burst out the general, as soon as he was safe in his own sanctuary, choking with passion, and tugging at the black stock and tight frock coat as if to put his threat of retiring into immediate execution. It was one of his peculiarities, which we have omitted to mention, to adopt this method of avoiding the common annoyances and irritations of life. When anything went wrong in the household, the General made no more ado but incontinently proceeded to *strip and turn in.* When there was an *émeute* below stairs, and Newton-Hollowes was in a 'state of siege'—a calamity which occurred about once in two years—the proprietor used to go to bed till the disturbance had completely blown over. When the news arrived of Mrs. Kettering's death, her brother gave vent to his feelings between the sheets, although he was obliged to get up within a few hours and travel post-haste to join the afflicted family at St. Swithin's; nay, it is related of him, that on one occasion, when an alarming fire happened to break out in a country-house where he was staying on a

visit, nothing but the personal exertions of his friends, who hurried after him and carried him off by force from his chamber, where he was rapidly undressing, prevented his being burnt alive in his night-cap. At the present crisis, the General had already divested himself of coat, waistcoat, etc., ere the sight of a clean change of apparel, laid out ready for his afternoon wear, altered the current of his ideas, and he bethought him that it would be wiser to walk down to his club, amuse himself as usual in his habitual resorts, and thus drive this impertinent 'attempt at extortion,' for so he did not hesitate to call it, entirely from his mind, than place himself at once *hors de combat* amongst the blankets. So, instead of his night-gear, the General struggled into a stiffer black stock and a tighter frock coat even than those which he had discarded, and arming himself with his formidable bamboo (how he wished the head and shoulders of his unknown correspondent were within its range), strutted off to Noodles', feeling as he cocked his chin up, and threw his chest out, and struck his cane against the sunny pavement, that he was still young and *debonnaire,* as in the *beaux jours* at Cheltenham twenty, ay, thirty years ago.

No place makes a man forget his years so much as London. In the great city one unit of that circling population rapidly loses his individuality. There nothing seems extraordinary—nothing seems out of the common course of events—there it is proverbial,

people of all pretensions immediately find their own level. If a man thinks he is wiser, or better, or cleverer, or handsomer, or stronger, or more famous than his neighbours, in London he will be sure to meet those who can equal, if not excel him, in all for which he gives himself credit; and so if an elderly gentleman begins to feel at his country-place that all around him speaks of maturity, not to say decay, that his young trees, and his old buildings, and his missing contemporaries, and the boy to whom he gave apples, standing for the county, and the village he remembers a hamlet growing into a town; and all such progressive arrangements of Father Time, hint rather personally at old-fellowhood, let him come to London and take his diversion amongst a crowd of fools more ancient than himself: he will feel a boy again—Regent-street will not appear altered to his enchanted eye, though they *have* taken down the colonnade in that well-remembered thoroughfare. Pall-Mall is as much Pall-Mall to him as it was when he trod it in considerably tighter boots, never mind how many years ago. At his club the same waiter (waiters never die) will bring him the paper, and stir the fire for him, just as he used to do when the Reform Bill was a thing unheard of, and he can contemplate his bald head in the very same mirror that once reflected locks of Hyacinthine cluster. He meets an old crony, and he is shocked (though but for the moment) to find him so dreadfully altered—

it is possible the old crony, in his heart of hearts, may return the compliment, but in all human probability he will greet the friend of his boyhood as if he had seen him the day before yesterday. If a very demonstrative man, and it should be before two o'clock in the day—for in the afternoon our English manners are all squared to the same pattern—the old crony may perhaps exclaim with languid rapture—'Why I havn't seen you *for ages*; I don't think you were in London *all* last season!' Why should our gentleman from the country undeceive him, and tell him they have not met for more than twenty years, and remind him with mellowing heart of boyhood's sunny hours and joyous escapadoes? The old crony will only think him *a twaddle* and *a bore*, and thank his stars that he has stuck to London and the world, and his gods, such as they are, and is a much *younger* man of his age than his rustic friend. And so our country-mouse will find in a day or two that the artificial sits quite as easily upon *him*. When he has visited two or three of his old haunts, he will feel as if he had never left them. He will go, perhaps, to some well-remembered palace of revelry, and find there, it may be, one contemporary out of a hundred with whom he once drank deep of dissipation and amusement, but he forgets the other ninety-nine. He feels as if the world had gone along with him, and that three-score years and odd were, after all, as the French King's Courtiers said: *L'age de tout le*

monde; so he lifts the cup of pleasure once more with shaking hands to his poor dry old lips, and pours its flood, erst so luscious, over a palate, alas, deadened to all but the intoxication of the draught. Why is it that we so sedulously strive to deceive ourselves about the lapse of time? Why do we so wilfully close our eyes to that certainty that every passing moment brings an instant nearer? It must come! Why will we not look the shape steadily in the face? We are not afraid to front our fellow-man in the struggle for life and death, why should we shrink from the shadowy foe, from whom there is no escape? Perhaps like all other distant horrors, it will lose half its terrors when it does approach—perhaps it will turn out a friend after all. Man lives in the future, can he not carry his future a little beyond life? Will it be such a bereavement to lose a poor old worn-out frame, with its gout and its Rheumatism, and its hundred aches, and pains, and burdens dragging it day by day towards the earth from whence it sprung; but where will the disembodied self find shelter? 'Ay, there's the rub,' and so 'conscience doth make cowards of us all.'

Well, young or old, boys will be boys, whether at one score or three, and all the sermonizing in the world will not empty St. James's-street towards four o'clock on a summer's afternoon, or prevent one nose being flattened against those club-windows from which the *terrarum domini* of the present day look upon the

world with a mixture of good-humoured satire and careless contempt. Stoics are they in manners and principles, Epicureans in tastes and practice, and Philosophers of the Porch on the clear, bright evenings—or rather midnights—when they assemble to smoke in gossiping brotherhood. But now, in the afternoon, laws human and divine would vote it 'bad style' to have anything in their mouths save the tops of their canes and riding-whips, and these are scarcely removed to make a passing remark on the unconscious General as having accomplished the crossing of Piccadilly, he sweeps under the guns of battery No. 1, on his way to his own resort, where he too will stand at a window and make comments on the passers-by. Talking of these batteries, we can recollect, old as we are, when we preferred to thread the press of Piccadilly, and so dodging down Bury-street to bring up eventually opposite Arlington-street, rather than face the ordeal of passing under those great guns. Yet was our cab well hung and well painted—our tiger a pocket-Apollo, and our horse well-actioned and in good condition, while no one but ourselves and the dealer who sold him to us could be aware of his broken knee. What strategy wasted! What skill in charioteering thrown away! How should we then, in our shy and sensitive boyhood, have winced from the truth, that no one probably in that dreaded window would have thought it worth while to waste a single monosyllable on anything so insignificant as

ourselves. Verily *mauvaise honte* is a contradictory foible, but of this weakness the General, like most men who have arrived at his time of life, has but a small leaven. He toddles boldly down, under the battery, masked as it is by the *Times* newspaper, and nods familiarly to a well-brushed hat and luxuriant pair of grey whiskers just peering above the broad-sheet. The whiskers return the salutation, and a stout gentleman at the fire-place, where he has been standing for the last three-quarters of an hour, hatted, gloved, and umbrellaed, as though prepared for instant departure, carelessly remarks, 'Old Bounce is getting devilish shaky;' to which the grey whiskers reply, 'No wonder; he 's an oldish fellow now. Why, Bounce 'll be a lieutenant-general next brevet. By the bye, when *are* we to have a brevet?' the whiskers forgetting, as after the lapse of so many years it is natural they should, that they were at school with 'the oldish fellow,' who was then a 'younger fellow' than themselves. However, they have talked about him quite long enough, and pass on to a fresh topic by the time the General himself arrives at Noodles'.

This very excellent and exclusive club seems to bear to institutions of a like nature much the same relation that Greenwich and Chelsea Hospitals do to the crews and battalions of our forces by Land and Sea. Should the warrior who enlists under the banner of Fashion have the good fortune to escape the

various casualties common in his profession, such as absentee-ism, imprisonment, marriage, or any other sort of ruin, he is pretty safe to anchor at Noodles' at last. There he brings up, after all his perils and all his triumphs, amongst a shattered remnant of those who set sail with him in the morning of life, when every wind was fair and every channel practicable. Many have been lured by the siren on to sunken rocks, and gone down 'all standing'—many have lost their reckoning and drifted clean away, till they can 'fetch up' no more—many have been captured by crafts trim and flaunting as themselves, and towed away as prizes into different havens, where they ride in somewhat wearisome monotony—and of many there is no account, save that which shall be rendered when the sea gives up its dead. Yet a few crazy old barks have made the haven at last, worn, leaky, and sea-worthless, with bulging ribs and warped spars, and tackle strained, yet are they still just buoyant enough to float—can still drift with the tide, and, above all, are still disposed to take in cargo on every available opportunity. As London is now constituted, you can almost tell a man's age by the clubs he frequents. 'Tell me your associates, and I will tell you your character,' says the ancient philosopher; 'Tell me your club, and I will tell you your age,' says the modern 'Ingenuous youth,' as that sporting Falstaff, Mr. Jorrocks calls him, begins with huge cigars, gin-and-soda-water, and billiards,

much bemused, at Trappe's. Anon, as his collars get higher, and the down upon his cheek begins to justify a nobler ambition, he aspires to the science of numbers, and lays the odds to more experienced calculators at 'the Short-Grass.' But our youth is becoming a man-about-town, or thinks he is, and must have the *entrée* to more than one of these luxurious republics; so according to his rank, his profession, or his pretensions, he affects another afternoon club, esteeming it, whichever it may be, the best and *most select* in London. Here he has a plentiful choice. If a professional or a politician, he will find associations purposely established for those of his own practice or opinions, and here they are looming like a city of palaces, the Conflagrative—the Anarchic—and the Regency—the Hat-and-Umbrella—the Chelsea—and the Peace and Plenty. Is there not the Megatherium for the literary, and the Munchausen for the travelled? But peradventure our youth is fast, and aspires to be man of figure, so shall his carriage be seen waiting at the Godiva, or himself shall face the ballot at Blight's. For a time all goes on smooth and sunny; but the young ones keep growing up, and they rather jostle him in his chair, and 'people let in such boys now-a-days'; so in disgust he abdicates a sovereignty conferred by years, and retreats to quieter resorts, where the cutlet is equally well dressed and the wine a thought better. So we find him presiding over house-dinners at

Alfred's, or winning the odd trick after a quiet *parti carré* at Snookes's. But even from these celestial seats he must be ousted at last. Still that pressure from below keeps increasing year by year, 'and the young men of the present day are so slang, and so noisy, and so disagreeable, that he can stand it no longer, and puts his name down for the first vacancy in that last refuge recommended by his old friend Sapless. Behold him at length shouldered into the harbour, and safely landed at Noodles'.'

Thither we have likewise brought the General, and given him ample time to spell through the papers, and reconnoitre his acquaintance as they pass up and down St. James'-street. But the General is ill at ease—he cannot get that infernal anonymous letter out of his head,—do what he will, he cannot prevent himself from glancing at the second column of the *Times*, and poring over a map of London in search of Goss-street, Tiler's-road, Lambeth. He fancies, too, as a man is apt to do when self-conscious of anything peculiar, that people look at him strangely; and if two men happen to whisper in a window, he cannot help thinking they must be talking about him. At last he gets nervous, and determines to take counsel of a friend; nor is he long in selecting a recipient for his sorrows, inasmuch as the most remarkable object in the room is Sir Bloomer Buttercup, who is standing in an attitude near the fire-place (Sir Bloomer, for certain mechanical reasons, cannot sit

down in that particular pair of trowsers), and to him the General resolves to confide his annoyances, and by his advice determines to abide. Although, probably, no man in this world ever managed his own affairs so badly as Sir Bloomer Buttercup, partly, it must be owned, in consequence of his having the most generous heart that ever beat under three inches of padding; yet in all matters unconnected with self, his judgment was as sound as his penetration was remarkable. No man had got his friends out of so many scrapes,—no man had given such good counsel, and no man had probably done so many foolish things, as kind, good-natured Sir Bloomer; and when he minced after the General into an empty room on those poor gouty shiny toes, he really felt as ready as he expressed himself, to 'see his old friend through it, whatever it was.'

'I'll tell you what, Bounce,' lisped the old beau, as the General concluded his tale with that most puzzling of questions, 'What would you advise me to do?'—'I'll tell you what—I think I know a fellow that can sift this for us to the bottom. You know, my dear boy, that I have occasionally been in slight difficulties—merely temporary, of course, and entirely owing to circumstances over which I had no control' (Sir B. had spent two fortunes, and was now living on the recollection of them, and the possible reversion of a third), 'but still difficulties—eh?—a ten-knot breeze was always more to my fancy

than a calm. Well, I 've been brought in contact with all kinds of fellows, and I do know one man, a sort of a lawyer, that 's *in* with every rogue in London. He could get to the rights of this in twenty-four hours, if we made it worth his while. He 's a clever fellow,' added Bloomer, reflectively, 'a very clever fellow,—in fact, a most consummate rascal. Shall I take you to him?'

'This instant,' burst out the General, with a terrific snatch at the bell—'I 'll send for my brougham —what?—it 'll be here in five minutes. 'Zounds, not go in a brougham? Why not?'

Sir Bloomer had frightful misgivings as to the effects on his costume of the necessary attitude in which carriage exercise must be taken; but in the cause of friendship he was prepared to hazard even a rupture of the most important ties, and he replied heroically, 'I 'll see you through it, Bounce; what o'clock is it? Ah! I promised—never mind—they must be disappointed sometimes; and for the sake of your charming niece, I 'd go through fire and water a good deal further than the City. Bounce, Bounce, what an angel that girl is? She mustn't be told a syllable of this—not a syllable; with me, of course, it 's secret as the grave.' So the pair started, firmly persuaded that not a soul in London, save their two selves, knew a word about the letter, or the will, or the dethronement of poor little Blanche from her pedestal as an heiress.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Strictest Confidence.

KEEPING A SECRET—LADY MOUNT HELICON 'AT HOME'—A CHAPTER OF FINANCE—WHY LACQUERS WENT TO THE BALL—EXOTICS IN A CONSERVATORY—MRS. BLACKLAMB AND HER CAVALIER—IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES—A LONG WAY OFF, AND FARTHER THAN THAT.

YOU must be an individual of an equally sanguine temperament and confiding disposition, if you believe that what you impart to your neighbour in the modern Babylon under seal of the strictest secrecy, might not as well be published in the leading article of the *Times* newspaper. How 'things get about,' is one of those inexplicable mysteries for which nobody is able or willing to account. Some people lay it to servants—some to the amiable generosity in imparting information for which the fair sex are so remarkable—the latter, again, say that 'every bit of scandal in London originates at those horrid clubs!' but few will allow that Rumour owes a large portion of her ubiquity to that organization of mankind, which makes a secret utterly valueless unless shared with another. What is the use of knowing something we must not tell? In the strictest confidence, of course—it was told us under promise that we would not

breathe a syllable to a single soul—we only make an exception in your favour, under the same solemn obligation. You of course, in mysterious conclave with Tom, will bear in mind our prohibition, and acting as we have done, Tom shall become a party to the treason. Still upon oath—it will not be long we think before Jack and Harry are empowered to join chorus, and whilst our cherished mystery becomes patent to the world in general, we ourselves feel completely absolved from the consequences of our breach of trust. In the whole of Lady Mount Helicon's crowded rooms to-night, we believe Blanche herself is the only person that is not aware of her own precarious position, and the girl, happy in her ignorance, looks brighter and more blooming than usual, though *the world* will admire her less on this occasion that it has ever done before. Yes, this is one of Lady Mount Helicon's 'at homes' with a small italicised '*dancing*' in the corner, and a very brilliant affair it is, as the hostess herself is fully persuaded:—the front and back drawing-room, and the boudoir beyond that, are thrown open and lighted with dazzling brilliancy, whilst a softer lustre shed upon the conservatory and balcony, craftily covered in for the purpose, lures to those irresistible man-traps without betraying their insidious design. Below stairs, libraries and school-rooms, and other resorts, devoted in everyday life to far more practical uses, are now cleared, and emptied for the reception of shawls, cloaks,

and coverings and the production of countless cups of tea and glasses of lemonade. Lady Mount Helicon's own maid, in a toilette of gorgeous magnificence, presides over this department, casting the while glances of covert scorn and envy at a younger and prettier assistant in a more becoming cap, on whom the dandies, as they enter, impress with unnecessary circumlocution the propriety of taking great care of their gregos, paletôts, and other sheep's-clothing. In the dining-room preparations are making for a 'stand-up' supper of unparalleled luxury, but we think it right to warn the champagne-drinking guests, that on passing the door in the morning we spied several hampers of that popular fluid, labelled with *the maker's name,* and much as we admire its chemical preparation and laudable cheapness, we are concerned to admit that 'the splendid sparkling of that house at 45s.'—always disarranges our internal economy for several days after an indulgence in its delights. Mount Helicon himself never drinks his mother's champagne, and to this abstinence he attributes his own unfailing health. At Dinadam's, or Lord Long-acres, or Wassail-worth, he does not by any means practise the same self-denial. Still it is doubtless good enough for a ball, and what with the young ladies, and the old gentlemen, and the servants, will experience a very fair consumption. A bearded band meanwhile is in waiting up-stairs, elaborately dressed,

and from the conductor in white kid gloves to *the Piccolo* in a chin-tuft, rejoicing in boots of jetty brilliancy, and neckcloths dazzling with starch. The whole establishment is so utterly at variance with its usual routine, and the house looks so entirely changed when thus stripped and lighted for reception, that if the old lord, who never permitted these *bouleversements*, could but come back, he would scarcely recognise his former home, and would unquestionably be glad to return to the quiet of his family vault. The presiding genius of the scene, the hostess herself, is already at her post. A very capital dress-maker, an abundance of well-selected jewellery, and a mysterious compound much enhancing the beauty of the human hair, have turned her out a very personable dame, and as she stands in the midst of her ball-room, as yet 'monarch of all she surveys,' and spreads her rustling folds, and buttons her well-fitting gloves, the possibility of her marrying again seems no such absurdity after all, nor does she herself look upon such an event as by any means a remote contingency. But soon the knocker is at work, the chariot-wheels are clattering in the street, and stentorian voices, louder in proportion to their indistinctness, announce the fast-arriving guests. Unlike a country ball, the feathers of the ladies require but little shaking after a short drive from the next street, nor, fresh from their own impartial mirrors, need they hazard the opinion of perhaps an unbe-

coming reflector, so they troop up stairs with small delay, their glossy locks, white shoulders, and gossamer draperies, showing to the greatest advantage in the well-lighted ball-room. The earliest arrivals of course receive the most affectionate greeting, proportionately decreased as the plot thickens, till the shake by both hands, and graceful little compliment about 'looking so well,' subsides into a stately courtesy and the coldest welcome good-breeding, not hospitality, will admit. At last all individual figures are well nigh lost in the crush. A mass of charming dresses and well-made coats are swaying and struggling in the doorways, the band is pealing forth a melody of Paradise, and the votaries of the quadrille are striving to adhere to their superstitious evolutions by treading on each other's toes, entangling each other's dresses, begging each other's pardon, and generally complaining of the heat of the atmosphere and crowded state of the room. It is at this juncture that 'General Bounce' and 'Miss Kettering' make their appearance, the General having placed a guard upon his lips, and neither during the dinner nor the drive hinted at his misgivings and inner discomfiture. 'Poor Blanche,' he mutters, as he follows her up the wide stately staircase; 'she'll know it soon enough, if it's true—zounds! a girl like that would be a prize without a penny—the young fellows nowadays are not like what *we* used to be.' And as the general arrived at this conclusion he

bowed his bald head nearly into Lady Mount Helicon's bosom, in return for her stately measured greeting—that greeting, both to himself and Blanche, was colder than usual; the girl, frank and unconscious, did not perceive the change, but her uncle caught himself saying almost aloud, 'Zounds, is it possible that this old cat knows it too?' The music ceased, the dancers walked about, the wrongly paired ones looking for 'mamma,' or 'my aunt,' inwardly longing to get rid of each other, and glancing in every direction for their own particular vanities, the more fortunate couples likewise keeping a sharp look-out for the chaperones, but this in order to avoid them, and hinting that 'It 's much cooler on the staircase,' or 'Have you seen the conservatory?' to prolong the delicious interview. The tea-room begins to fill, and incautious youth presses that domestic beverage on beauty nothing loth, nor reflects that charming as are those ringlets drooping over the cup, and rosy as are the lips that whisper their soft affirmative, it would be as well that he should distinctly know his own mind, as to whether he would like this celestial being to make tea for him during the rest of his life, and whether it would be always as sweet as it is now. For the first time in her experience of a London season, Blanche begins to think it a 'stupid ball.' She has not yet been asked to dance; and spoilt by her previous successes, she feels hurt at the neglect. 'The best men,' as they are called, have not yet,

indeed, arrived; if, as is somewhat uncertain, they will come at all; for they sometimes throw Lady Mount Helicon over; and 'Mount' himself is still detained at 'the House.' But there are plenty of beardless dandies and gay young guardsmen, who are far more prone to dance, and yet they all seem to keep aloof. To be sure, whenever they *have* asked her formerly, she has always been 'engaged'; but she would like to stand up now, even with young Deadlock, if it was only for 'the look of the thing.' However, she hangs contentedly on the General's arm, and 'bides her time.' It is not long coming. A tall, good-looking man, with features expressive only of a kind disposition and a general air of self-satisfaction, bows, and sidles and screws himself towards Blanche and her chaperon, receiving as his natural homage the smiles of the old ladies on whose toes he is treading, and regardless of the imploring looks of the young ones, who hope he is going to ask them to dance. His glossy hair is curled distinctly in five rows, which, according to Lord Mount Helicon's account, betokens weighty intentions; and it is no other than our friend Captain Lacquers, who has dined temperately, abjured his usual cigar, and come here for the especial purpose of meeting Miss Kettering. A bow, an indistinct murmur about 'not engaged,' and 'honour,' and 'delighted,' and the couple are off, tripping gracefully round amongst the whirling confusion of the *Valse des*

Fantassins, truly 'a mighty maze, but not without a plan.'

To explain the intentions of our rotatory hussar, we must take the liberty of putting the clock back a few hours—an impossibility only permitted to the novelist—and record a conversation which took place between Lacquers and his friend Sir Ascot that very afternoon, in a secluded window of the Godiva Club.

'Well out of this business about Miss Kettering,' said the latter, who was becoming more communicative since he had found so little difficulty in speaking his mind to Blanche on a previous occasion, 'You've heard of the smash? Not a penny, after all. Downright swindling, I call it—that old Bounce must be a deep one. They tell me that except the life-interest of the house in Grosvenor-square, she hasn't a brass farthing. It's frightful to think of,' added the old head on young shoulders, scanning with rigid attention his companion's face, in which concern was more apparent than surprise.

'Poor thing, poor thing,' rejoined Lacquers, 'I had no idea it was so bad as that. They told me she was sure to have Newton-Hollowes, at any rate. She must feel it sadly, poor girl; I wonder how she looks since it all came out.'

'Oh, I fancy very few people know it as yet,' suggested Sir Ascot, who was somewhat uncharitable in his conclusions. 'I dare say, they'll try to brazen

it out, at least till the end of the season. They may if they like, for all I care. I never knew any good come of these *half-bred* ones, and *I'll* have nothing more to do with them!'

Lacquers heard as though he heard him not. He was trying to think, and his well-cut features were gathered into an expression of hopeless perplexity, at which his companion could scarce forbear laughing outright. At last he had recourse to the never-failing moustache; and drawing inspiration from its touch, he began—

'Uppy, you 're a safe fellow,—eh?—would'nt throw a fellow over, and put him in the hole, you know. You 've got some brains, too—made a capital book on the Ascot Stakes. Now you understand finance and arithmetic, and that—what should *you* say a married fellow could live upon? Of course he wouldn't require so many luxuries as a single one; but what do you think, now, a fellow like *me*, for instance, could do with?'

Sir Ascot looked completely taken aback. 'Why, you 'd never be such a fool as to think of——'

'That's neither here nor there, old boy,' interrupted Lacquers; 'of course if I *do*, you shall have the earliest intelligence. But come, here 's a book and a pencil; let 's see how the thing would work with good management and strict economy. *Strict economy*, you know, of course.' Lacquers had a great idea, *in theory*, of strict economy. So the young men sat

down, and went deep into the various items of rent, and stable expenses, and opera boxes, and pin money, and cigars, and travelling; Sir Ascot arriving at the conclusion that a quiet couple might manage to exist upon something over two thousand a-year; whilst Lacquers thought it was to be done, with *strict economy* of course, for about five hundred less; but as they both entirely overlooked an indispensable item termed 'housekeeping,' we think it needless to record their calculations for the benefit of the inexperienced.

'Well,' said Lacquers, when he had finished his arithmetic and put his betting-book once more into his pocket. 'I think it can be done—I believe a fellow *ought* to marry, you know; what does Shakspeare say about 'Solitude being born a twin?' it certainly sobers him' (Sir Ascot smiled as he admitted that was undoubtedly a strong argument)—'and altogether married fellows get into more respectable habits. Look at a breakfast in a country house, you see all the married ones up and dressed with the lark, while the single men come dawdling down at all hours. Yes, there's a good deal to be said on both sides, like a Chancery lawsuit, but I'll think it over, Uppy, my boy, I'll think it over'—and Lacquers did think it over, and arrived at a conclusion as honourable to his heart as it was antagonistic to that worldly wisdom by which all with whom he associated thought it right to regulate their every action. Here was a man spoilt by the accident of personal beauty and good

birth and position. From his earliest boyhood he had never been taught that there was any ulterior object in life save to shine in society, if not intellectually, why physically, with a handsome person and fine clothes—a far more effectual passport than all the talents, to the good graces of the world. What wonder that the tree grew up as it had been bent? what wonder that the hussar had scarcely two ideas beyond his uniform and his betting-book, and his seat upon a horse? that he looked on the world at large as the butterfly on the sunny square enclosed by the garden wall, a mere stage for display, a mere hotbed for physical enjoyment, to be got the most out of during the bright gaudy hours of noon—and afterwards—why afterwards, when the sun goes down and the chill dews of evening clog his fading wings—the butterfly must do the best he can and perish as he may. With such an education, the sole manly quality left was courage, and it was only the touchstone of a gentle face like Blanche's that brought out the latent generosity of a character overlaid with faults, for which its training was more to blame than its organization. We are obliged to confess that Lacquers was vain, thoughtless, self-opinionated, frivolous, ignorant and empty-headed, but there *was* some good in him, and it was brought out, as it always will be when it exists at all, by a woman's smile, and above all, by a woman's misfortunes.

Lacquers made up his mind that he would marry

Blanche Kettering without a sixpence. The young lady's consent he rather prematurely counted on as a matter of course, but in making this resolution he deserves some credit for the readiness with which he was prepared to sacrifice all that to him was precious in life, at the feet of his ladye-love. He was a younger brother, and it is needless to add, considerably involved—of course he must bid farewell to all those amusements and pursuits which have hitherto constituted his actual existence. No more Derbys and Hamptons, and Richmond breakfasts, and Greenwich dinners, all vanities enticing enough in their way—no more stalls at the opera, and supper parties in the suburbs, likewise vanities of a more dangerous tendency—no more hunting in Leicestershire and deer stalking in Scotland, yachting at Cowes, and philandering at Paris—all these must be given up, and worse than all, the profession he delights in, the regiment he is devoted to, must be offered at the shrine of domestic respectability. That these would be privations no man could feel more keenly than Lacquers, yet was he prepared to go through with it, and had it been necessary, we firmly believe he would have cut off his very moustaches and laid them at the feet of Blanche Kettering! Therefore it was that he appeared on the evening in question, at Lady Mount Helicon's ball—therefore it was that his manner had assumed a softness and diffidence which made Blanche confess to herself as she leaned on his arm in the

intervals of the dance that he was 'really very much improved;' and therefore it was that he suggested the old excuse of 'looking at the flowers in the conservatory,' and skilfully availing himself of a general rush down stairs connected with supper, managed to entice his partner into a secluded corner of that love-making retreat, which had indeed been already occupied by several pairs for the same purpose, and having furnished her with a cup of tea, and himself with an ice to keep them both quiet, he entered with much circumlocution on one of those embarrassing interviews such as, we are quite sure, no lady who condescends to glance over these pages but must have experienced at least *once* before she had been out two seasons.

'That's a case,' said Mrs. Blacklamb, as she swept down to supper on Lord Mount Helicon's arm, her dark haughty features writhing with something between a smile and a sneer, while she caught a glimpse of Blanche's well-cut profile, and one of Lacquers's faultless boots, in a mirror opposite their retreat. 'Will it *be*, do you think?' she added, with a softening expression, for all women warm towards a love-affair, and even Mrs. Blacklamb, with her many faults, was a very woman, perhaps rather too much so, in her heart of hearts.

'I hope not,' replied 'Mount,' with a smile into his companion's face. 'I'm very much in love with her myself. If it hadn't been for 'the Division' I should have been where Lacquers is at this moment.

Look what my patriotism has cost me, but I don't regret it *now*,' and he emphasized the monosyllable with an almost imperceptible pressure of the arm that hung upon his own, a movement that had little effect on Mrs. Blacklamb, with whom flirtation (whatever that comprehensive word may mean) was the daily business of life.

'Why, you know you would have married her, and too happy if she had only been the catch you all thought she was,' replied the lady. 'I must say I could not help being delighted, though I was sorry for *her*, poor girl, to see you all 'getting out' just as you do when some race-horse breaks down, trying which could be first to pull himself clear of the scrape and leave his neighbours in the lurch. Major D'Orville behaved *shamefully*; and you still worse, for she really was fond of *you*.'

'Mount's' imperturbable good-humour was proof against quizzing, so the sneer fell harmless, and he replied carelessly, 'Fond, of course she was, but not so *very* fond—no. Mrs. Blacklamb, I 'm easily imposed on by ladies. I think it's my diffidence that stands so much in my way, even where my affections are most irrevocably engaged, where I worship in hopeless constancy, and I feel my heart breaking—and my—my—my hair coming out of curl, I dare not ask my enslaver more than whether she will have a glass of wine. Give Mrs. Blacklamb some champagne, and I 'll have a little sherry, if you please;' so

the pair went on jesting and philandering, and making fools of each other and of themselves, but they troubled their heads no more about the couple in the conservatory; and when 'Mount' deserted his fair companion and returned into the ball-room, as he said, 'to dance just once with Miss Kettering, in common decency,' he sought her in vain, for she was gone.

'Uncle Baldwin,' said Blanche, when they reached home, and lingered a moment in the drawing-room before retiring, 'Uncle Baldwin, I 've got something to say to you.' Blanche blushed, and hesitated, and looked at the little white satin shoe she was resting on the fender in every possible point of view. 'To-night at the ball, I—that 's to say, Captain Lacquers—in short, I dare say you remarked—in the conservatory, you know—O Uncle Baldwin, *he proposed* to me,' and Blanche, half-laughing, half-crying, and blushing over her neck and shoulders, hid her face on the breast of the General's coat, as she used to do when she had been a naughty little girl and repented, ten years ago.

'Zounds, Blanche, what did you say?' burst out the General, in a terrible taking, as he thought now everything must come out. 'Yes or No, my darling, don't keep me in suspense—which is it, heads or tails? in or out? I mean, Yes or No?'

'No!' whispered Blanche, to the General's inexpressible relief, who cooled down into a prolonged *whew*, like the escape of steam from a safety-valve;

'but it was rather difficult to say it, he seemed so sorry and so patient and considerate; do you know, Uncle Baldwin, I never thought so highly of Captain Lacquers as I do to-night.'

'Probably not, my dear,' grunted the General, 'you never knew before he thought so highly of you. But, Blanche, as we are here and—and it 's not very late—zounds, they 've put that clock on again—well, dear, I too, have got something to tell you, but mine, I am sorry to say, is bad news. Prepare yourself, my dear Blanche. I 'm sure you will bear it well, my little pet, and as long as I have a roof over my head you will have a home; but, in short, it 's no use mincing the matter, Blanche, you 're not an heiress after all—you won't have a sixpence beyond what I can leave you, and that's little enough, heaven knows. They've found your mother's will, my dear, and a most unfair and unreasonable will it is; but still, my pretty Blanche, it makes you a penniless young lady after all!'

'Is that the worst?' answered Blanche, looking up with an air of immense relief, though she had turned deadly pale; 'Is that all, Uncle Baldwin? dear me, I 'm no worse off than half the other girls I know. We shall leave this house, I suppose,' she added, looking round at the ample room and its stately furniture, jumping at once to conclusions, as young ladies will do, 'and we shall live entirely at Newton-Hollows, and I shall be there all the time my garden

looks most beautiful; but we shan't have to send away Mrs. Delaval, shall we?' (the General winced). 'And when will it all be settled? and when shall we go?'

'Blanche, you're a diamond,' said the General, his eyes filling with tears; 'you've the pluck of ten women. You ought to have commanded the Kedjerees. Go to bed now, my dear, and to-morrow we'll look things boldly in the face, and see what is best to be done.' So the General stumped off with his bed-candle, more than ever doting on his niece, more than ever persuaded that she inherited her sterling qualities from his side of the house, and not from that 'poor foolish old Kettering,' as he called him, and more than ever indignant with all the young men of his acquaintance, except Lacquers, for not being on their knees to Blanche. 'They've no energy, they've no devotion; zounds, they've no chivalry amongst 'em—none whatever! If I was such a fellow as any one of these, 'gad, I'd go to bed and never get up again,' with which soliloquy the General proceeded to divest himself of his ball-going attire, and prepare for his refuge from all the ills of life.

To those who are conversant with the habits of ladies, it is needless to mention that Blanche did not, by any means, follow her uncle's excellent advice and example, in betaking herself to immediate repose. The fair sex will easily comprehend how she sought

Mrs. Delaval's room, and how the two ladies sat up in 'their wrappers' and consoled each other, and talked it all over, backwards and forwards, and came to no very logical conclusions, and, above all, how the proposal and its reception were quite as engrossing a topic, and were quite as much dwelt on as the loss of Blanche's fine fortune; nor will it escape their observation that Mary's greater worldly experience would clearly foresee the substitution of one cousin for another, in this revolution amongst the Kettering possessions, and how a marriage between the two was the only plan to make everything right, and how the fair young face, with its kind eyes, that had haunted her so long, was further from her now than ever. She knew, of course, long ago, that it was hopeless and impossible—that must surely have been a great consolation! When a child cries for the moon and a cloud comes and covers up the coveted bauble, and hides it away, the urchin has small comfort in being told that it is just as near the object of its desire as when it could see it, and look, and long, and stretch its tiny hands. When the beggar-maiden sets her affections on King Cophetua, without a hope, in these days, of the famous fabulous *mésalliance* being perpetrated, the fact that it does not, in reality, remove him one iota further than before from her humble self, helps but little to assuage the pang inflicted on her infatuated heart by his Majesty's nuptials with one of his own degree. The impossible may

be increased in love, if not in logic, and Mary was lying awake and desponding, long after Blanche had forgotten all the excitement and changes of the evening, in happy dreamless slumbers.

CHAPTER XIX.

Despatches.

SOCIAL LIBERTY—DOMESTIC ECONOMY—A GAZETTE FROM THE CAPE—A MAN OF MANY IRONS—A TRUE FRIEND—A REAL HERO—COUPLES NOT PAIRS—OH ME MISERUM!—GATHERED IN THE DEW.

MARY DELAVAL, in London, was one of the many flowers born to 'waste their sweetness on the desert air,' for London is, indeed, a desert to those who are in it and not of it, whose destiny seems to have been warped into a strange unfitness in the great struggling, noisy, pompous town; whose proper place would seem to be in some quiet, secluded nook, the ornament and the joy of a peaceful home, instead of the ever-shifting surface of that seething tide which drifts them here and there in aimless restlessness. Verily, Fortune does sometimes shuffle the pack in most inexplicable confusion—*Ludum insolentem, ludere pertinax*—she seems to take a perverse pleasure in smuggling the court-cards into all sorts of incongruous places, and to carry out the Latin poet's metaphor, *transmutat incertos honores*, or, in plain English, palms the trumps, with dexterous sleight-of-hand, where they seem utterly valueless to influence the result of the game. As society is con-

stituted, such a woman as Mary, with her queenly dignity, her charming manner, her striking beauty, and above all, her noble, well-cultivated mind, was just as thoroughly *tabooed* and excluded from the circle of her so-called superiors, as if she had been a quadroon in the United States, whose very beauty owes its brilliance to that African stain which, in the Land of Freedom and Equality, makes a shade of colouring the badge that entitles man to lord it over his brother more despotically than over the beasts of the field. Thank God for it, we have no slavery in England; and the time cannot be very far distant when slavery shall be a word without a meaning in the dictionary of every language on the face of the globe. Already, from East to West, the trumpet-note has sounded, and those stir in their sleep who have drugged themselves into insensibility, and stopped their ears against the voice of the charmer, but cannot smother the still, small whisper within. Scarcely has its last peal died away beneath the blushing Western wave, ere its echoes are caught up in the very heart of the Morning Land, and even now, while we write, a Barbarian despot is quailing on his celestial throne, and the voice of liberty—real Liberty, Civilization, and Christianity—is thundering in the ears of millions and millions of immortal beings, hitherto held in thraldom throughout that mysterious empire which, for ages, has been a sealed book to all other nations upon earth. Shall not England still be in

the van, as she has always been? never yet has she failed in the good cause, and never will she. Has she not ever stuck for Freedom and the Cross? inseparable watchwords that the experience of the world has taught us must go hand-in-hand, or not at all; and where she strikes, good faith, she drives well home. Has she not ever been the first assailant in the breach? stood the outmost bulwark in the gap? and will she fail now? Believe it not. Her destiny would seem the brightest that Providence has yet ordained for any nation since the world began. Formidable and glorious without, she is setting her house in order within. Steadily and gradually the good cause—the universal brotherhood of the soul—is progressing everywhere; through wars and rumours of wars, through political clouds and private disappointments, there seems to be in all men's minds a settled conviction that 'the good time's coming'; and if, as we firmly believe, England shall bear the glorious banner in the van, why, night and morning, will we go down upon our knees and thank God that we are Englishmen! But what has all this to do with a penniless governess, sitting up two pair of stairs in Grosvenor-square? Thus much, as we think: our social system is yet a long way from perfection—there is yet much to be improved and much prejudice to be taken away—we have too much class-feeling and class-isolation, and, perhaps, on no people do these short-comings in our charity fall so

heavily as on those to whom we entrust the education of our children. What is it in which we are so superior to them that entitles us to hold ourselves thus aloof, and, for all the courtesy of our wayfaring salutation, virtually 'to pass by on the other side'? What is it that constitutes the talismanic qualification for what we modestly term *good* society? Is it birth, that accident on which we so rationally plume ourselves? They generally possess even that negative advantage. Is it education, intellect, cultivation of mind? We do not entrust our darlings to their care because they are *inferior* to us in attainments, or we should teach the pupils ourselves. Is it manner? We do not quarrel with a peer for being gross, or a millionaire for being vulgar—and those of whom we are speaking generally show no want, at least, of decorum in their demeanour and conversation. Is it money? God forbid! Is it then mere frivolity and assumption in which we excel? For shame! No; the truth must out, there is a leaven still left in us of the very essence of vulgarity, the feeling that we are ill-at-ease with a so-called inferior, or the domineering spirit, which every schoolboy knows too well, prompting us to exult in every chance advantage we may possess over a fellow-creature. Of these amiable causes we may take our choice; but one or other it is which leaves the governess to pine upstairs in her school-room, while revelry and pleasure and good-fellowship are laughing below.

Now, Mary had, indeed, little of this sort of neglect to complain of; yet was she lonely and sad during the London season which Blanche enjoyed so much. She could not, of course, accompany her to all the balls and 'at homes' which were fast becoming the business of the girl's life; if she had, we think the worshipful body of chaperones would have lost nothing in dignity, and gained a good deal in grace, beauty and good-humour by her adhesion. So she felt she was too much separated from Blanche, whom she dearly loved, and it was with a sensation almost of satisfaction, for which she was, nevertheless, quite angry with herself, that she heard of the entire disturbance of all the family arrangements and the loss of fortune sustained by the young heiress. 'Ah,' thought Mary, 'perhaps I may be of some use to her now in her distress; at any rate, I can give her good counsel and practical instruction how *to bear*—none better;' and had it not been for a certain marriage, which seemed more than ever indispensable, Mary would have been ashamed to confess to herself how glad she was.

The General, it is needless to say, was a man of vigorous execution when he had once made up his mind. He had ascertained, as he believed, the validity of the will, had paid Gingham her legacy, with a gratuity over and above on his own account, and now held a council of war with the two ladies, before breakfast, in which he discloses his plans with a

degree of meekness nothing could ever have brought him to, save a misfortune affecting his beloved Blanche.

'No going abroad this year, my dear,' said the General, looking the while less warlike than usual; 'glad of it—what? A German watering-place—Bah! an association of blackguards in an over-grown village, robbing the public to soft music in the open air. No, my dear, we'll get to Newton-Hollows before the strawberries are done—and I'm glad of it. We'll let this great house—you're tired of it, Blanche, and so am I; what's the use of a house all up and down stairs? You should have seen my bungalow at Simlah—a man could get about in that and hear himself speak. Well, we'll put down two of the carriages and one of the footmen—that pompous one. Zounds, if he had staid a week longer, I must have bastinadoed him—and we'll start Poulard: confound him, he never gives one a dinner fit to eat, and wouldn't dress a cutlet for Mrs. Delaval, only the day before yesterday, because we dined out—I'll trounce him before he goes. Then, my dear, we'll keep your scrubby pony for the little carriage, and Water-King can go down home with the others, and you'll ride a deal more there than in London, Blanche. Manage? I'll manage—how d'ye mean? I'm only a steward till Charlie comes back. I must write to Charlie by this mail, and we'll have him safe and sound from the Kaffirs—and rejoicings when

he comes home, and a—who knows what?—(Mary Delaval got up at this juncture, went to fetch her work, and sat majestically down to it, as the General went on).—'Yes, we'll make it all right when Charlie comes back. Let me see, we ought to have a mail to-day. Zounds, these servants, they read all the news—money-market, foreign intelligence, every one of their own cursed advertisements for places they won't keep six months—and then if I ask whether the paper's come, 'Please, sir, it's not ironed.' Ironed! 'Gad I'll iron them—wish I'd my Kitmugar here—bamboozle them well on the soles of their feet—there's no liberty in this country. Blanche, ring the bell, there's a dear—oh, here it comes,' and the General's further strictures were cut short by the entrance of his old, pompous servant, who laid the paper out for his master's perusal with a strange air of mingled pity and concern. The General put on his spectacles, deliberately unfolded the sheet, and after a glance at the money-market, in which consols had, as usual, fluctuated the fraction of a fraction, he turned to the well-known column in which the budget of the African mail was likely to be detailed; Blanche leaning over his shoulder the while, and Mary watching them with an eager glance that seemed almost prescient of evil. Suddenly the General's face flushed up to a purple hue. 'Engagement with the Kaffirs,' he muttered, 'gallant repulse of the enemy—capture—loss—strong position—bril-

liant success of the Light Brigade—O my boy! my boy!' And, forgetful of all around, the old man leaned his head upon the table and gave way to a passion of grief that was frightful to contemplate. There it was, sure enough, in distinct, choicely printed types—there was no mistaking the name, or the regiment, or the authenticity of the report, and Blanche, with bloodless lips and stony eyes, could see nothing but that one line of hopeless import—'Missing, Cornet Kettering, of the 20th Lancers.' Yes, she had skimmed through killed and wounded, with the agonising fear of seeing her cousin returned in that awful list, and a deep sigh of relief was rising to her lips as she recognised no beloved name among the sufferers, when it was frozen back again by the startling truth. And there she stood, utterly colourless, her hair pushed back from her temples, and her eyes staring wildly and vacantly, as she kept her finger pressed on the dreadful line, of which she too well comprehended the meaning.

The General rocked to and fro in an agony of grief, his broken exclamations of childish despair strangely mingled with those warlike sentiments of honour and resignation which become second nature in the soldier's character.

'My boy, my boy, my gallant, handsome, light-hearted Charlie. I might have known it must be so —I've seen it a hundred times—the youngest, the

fairest, the happiest, go down at the first shot. That pale, tender lad at the sortie from Bayonne—my subaltern at Quatre Bras—my aide-de-camp in the Deccan, always the brightest and the most hopeful—and now my boy, my Charlie. Why did I let him go? a soldier's fate poor lad. Well, well, every bullet has its billet—but, oh, he need never have gone to that savage country. O my boy, my boy, you were more than a son to me, and now you're lying mangled and rotting in the bush below the Anatolas.'

Mary alone preserved her presence of mind. Utter despair is the most powerful of sedatives; and she walked deliberately across the room, took the paper from Blanche's unresisting hands, and satisfied herself of the worst. A special paragraph of nearly six lines was devoted to the fate of 'this gallant and promising young officer, who was last seen waving his men on in a brilliant attack which he led against a numerous horde of savages; the enemy were driven from their defences at all points; but we regret to learn Cornet Kettering was reported missing at nightfall, and we have reason to fear, from the barbarous and ferocious character of Kaffir warfare, it will be almost impossible to recover or identify his remains.'

And was this the end of all? Was this the fate of the bright, happy, beloved boy, whose image, as she last saw him, radiant in health and hope, had

never since left her mind?—mangled—defaced—butchered—dead!—that awful word comprised everything—never to see him more, never to hear his voice; to feel as if it was all a dream, as if it had never been; as if there was no Past, and there would be no Future—that the deadening, heavy, soul-sickening Present was to be all! But she could not give him up like this: the report was dated immediately previous to the departure of the mail, and there might be a possibility of error. Steadily, calmly, closely, like a heroine as she was, Mary read through the whole official account of the engagement, word for word, and line for line; how 'the Brigadier had received information of the enemy's movements, and had held himself in readiness, and had given such and such orders, and executed such and such movements,' all detailed in the happy, self-satisfied style which characterises official accounts of the game of death; how in a previous report his Excellency had been apprised of the capture of so many head of cattle, and the submission of so many chiefs with hard names; and how the Brigadier had great pleasure in informing his Excellency of the further capture of several thousand oxen, and the discomfiture of more chiefs, and all with a loss of life trifling compared to the important results of this brilliant *coup-de-main*. How the troops, and the levies, and the Hottentots, had each and all reaped their share of laurels, by their gallantry in attack, their steadi-

ness under fire, and general cheerfulness and good discipline through long toilsome marches and harassing privations; and how the Brigadier's own thanks were due to officers commanding regiments, and officers commanding companies, and his aides-de-camp, and his Quartermaster, and his medical staff, and all the brave fellows who had won their share in the triumph of the hour; and the report concluded with a few feeling words of manly regret for those who had earned a soldier's grave, amongst whom, poor 'Old Swipes,' shot down as he led his men so gallantly to the attack, was not forgotten; whilst a line of concern for the uncertainty attending Cornet Kettering's fate (otherwise honourably mentioned in the despatch) wound up the whole. All this Mary read, with a painful distinctness that seemed to burn every word into her brain, and from it she gathered, indeed small hope and small consolation. Truly war is a fine thing in the abstract! The martial music, the flaunting colours, the steady tramp of bold, bronzed men, exulting in their freemasonry of danger, the enthusiasm of the spectators, the professional charlatanry (we use the word with no disrespectful meaning) which pervades the brotherhood,—all this is taking enough when the engine is in repose; and then the joys of a campaign, the continual change of scene, the never-flagging excitement, the little luxuries of the bivouac, the rough good-fellowship of the march, and the boiling thrilling excitement of the

encounter—all these doubtless have their charms when the machine is put into action; but there is a sad reverse to the picture, and those who read with the military enthusiasm of ignorance such captivating accounts of brilliant strategy and daring heroism, should recollect that the same gazette which makes captains and colonels, makes also widows and orphans; that eyes are gushing, and hearts breaking over those very lines that bid the uninteresting peruser thrill with warlike ardour and half-envious pride in the deeds of arms of his countrymen. The greatest hero of the age has recorded his opinion of those scenes in which he reaped his own immortal laurels, when he said, 'he prayed God he might never again see so frightful a calamity as a national war;' and his opinion has been often quoted, to the effect that a battle won was the next most horrible sight to a battle lost. Far and wide spreads the crop of misery that springs from that iron shower. Its effects are not confined to wasted fields and blackened houses, and devoted ranks, stretched where they fell in all the ghastly distortions of violent death. Far, far away, in happy homes and peaceful families, women and children must wail and pine in vain for him whom they will never see again on earth; and the ounce of lead that carries death into that loyal, kind heart, scatters misery and grief, and penury, perhaps, and ruin, over the gentle dependents here at home in England, that have none to trust to, none

to care for them, save him who lies cold and stiff upon the field of glory. Glory! when will men learn the right meaning of the word?

Well, three lines in the gazette had brought misery enough to the inmates of the house in Grosvenor-square. How paltry to them now seemed the household cares and little money-arrangements that had occupied their morning consultation! What was there to arrange for now? What signified it how things went? He would never return to enjoy the fruits of their care. What mattered it who had the house, and the fortune, and the plate, and the personalities, and all the paltry dross, which now showed its real value?—to-morrow it will begin again to resume its fictitious appearance, for grief passes as surely as does the cloud. But to-day the General and Blanche are almost stupified, and can think of nothing but Charlie—dear, *dear*, lost Charlie. The old man sits rocking to and fro, in violent paroxysms, frightful in one of his age—who would have thought he had so much feeling left in him?—and Blanche is exhausted with weeping, and lies with her face buried, and long her golden air trailing over the sofa-cushions, incapable of thought or exertion. Mary alone retains her presence of mind; Mary alone vindicates her noble nature in the hour of trial; Mary alone is fit to command; and Mary alone resolves upon what is best to be done, and proceeds at once to put her schemes into execution. There is but one person to apply to for advice and assistance;

there is but one friend in whom the bereaved family can confide; who should it be but kind, generous, bold-hearted Frank Hardingstone? Mary puts on her bonnet and shawl: out of the confused mass in the hall she selects Mr. Hardingstone's card, ascertains his address, and, without saying a word about her intentions, sallies forth to seek him out, primed with the eloquence of a woman's hopeless, unselfish love.

Frank has lingered on in London, he scarce knows why. He is training his strong, masculine mind to bear the loss of Blanche—for he feels that Blanche is lost to him—just as he would train to make any other effort, or endure any other suffering. His mornings are spent in close and severe study; his afternoons in those athletic exercises at which he is so proficient; and in the evening he goes into *men's* society, as gentlemen do when they are sore about the other sex, and tries to be amused, and to enter into the frivolities and pastimes of his associates, and succeeds sometimes indifferently badly, sometimes not at all. Strange visitors are admitted to Frank's morning-room at the hotel where he puts up—the waiter cannot make him out at all. Now an engineer, in his Sunday clothes, but with a rough chin and grimy hands, is closeted with him all the morning, and the waiter overhears casual expressions, such as 'power,' and 'gradients,' and 'angles,' and 'the motive,' and 'the bite,' and 'the catch,' which, on

the principle of *omne ignotum pro terribili*, make his hair stand on end. Then, just as he had made up his mind that Mr. Hardingstone is *professional*, and not a *real* gent after all, some live Duke or magnificent Marquis comes in with his hat on, and says, 'Frank, my dear fellow, how goes it?' and the waiter's conclusions are again completely upset. Then an archæologian, with smooth white neck-cloth, and well-brushed beaver, steps gravely upstairs, and remains for hours discussing the probable site of some problematic edifice which there is reason to suppose *might* have been pulled down by the Confessor; and on this interesting topic they lavish a store of knowledge, penetration, and research rather disproportioned to the result arrived at, till the archæologian stays to have luncheon, and shows no small energy even at that. The waiter begins to think Mr. Hardingstone is a gent connected with the British Museum (for which institution he entertains a superstitious reverence), and possibly a fellow-labourer with Layard and Rawlinson. But, again, twice a-week, an individual is admitted whose general appearance is so much the reverse of the respectable, sleek archæologian, that the waiter finds it impossible to reconcile the contradiction of Mr. Hardingstone's being, as he terms it, '*in* with both.' This latter visitor is of athletic frame, and remarkably forbidding countenance, none the less so from an originally snub nose having been smashed into a sort of plaster over

the adjoining territory. His hair is cut as short as is consistent with the use of scissors, and his arms, in very tight sleeves, hang down his sides as if they were in the last stage of powerless fatigue. He dresses as though he kept a horse, yet is his gait that of a man who is continually on his legs, active as a cat, and of no mean pedestrian powers. He remains with Mr. Hardingstone about an hour, during which time much shuffling of feet is heard, and much hard breathing, with occasional expectoration on the part of the visitor. The windows are invariably thrown wide open during the interview; and at its conclusion, the stranger being supplied with beer, for which fluid he entertains a remarkable predilection, wipes his mouth on his sleeve, and expresses his satisfaction at the hospitality of his entertainer, and the warmth of his reception, by stating, in reprehensibly strong language, that he has had 'a—something—good bellyful.' This too is a professor, and a scientific man, but his profession is that of pugilism, his science the noble one of self-defence. So the waiter is again all abroad: but when Mary Delaval puts up her veil, and taking out a plain card with her name written thereon, requests the astonished functionary to 'take it up to Mr. Hardingstone, and tell him a lady wishes to see him,' even a waiter's self-command is overcome, and he can only relieve his feelings by the execution of an infinity of winks for his own benefit, and the frequent repetition of 'Well, this

beats cock-fighting!' as he ushers the lady up the hotel-stairs, and points out to her the rooms occupied by the mysterious guest.

Most people would have considered Frank hardly prepared to receive visits from a lady, both in respect of his costume, and the general arrangement of his apartment. He was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, unbraced, and with his neck bare; his large, loose frame curled up on a short, uncomfortable sofa, in anything but a graceful position, and his broad, manly countenance gathered into an expression of intense, almost painful attention. A short pipe between his strong white teeth filled the room with odours only preferable to that of *stale* tobacco-smoke, with which its atmosphere was generally laden, and the book on his knee was a ponderous quarto, to the full as heavy as it looked, and fit for even Frank's large intellect to grapple with. The furniture was simple enough; most of that which belonged to the hotel had been put away, and a set of boxing-gloves, two or three foils, a small black leather portmanteau, and a few books of the same stamp as that on the owner's knee, comprised almost the only objects in the apartment. The morning paper was lying unopened on the window-sill. When he saw who it was, Frank started up with a blush, snatched the short pipe out of his mouth, set a chair for his visitor, and sitting bolt upright on the short sofa, stared at her with a ludicrous expression of mingled shyness

and surprise. He was glad to see her, too—for why? —she belonged in some sort to Blanche.

'Have you seen the morning paper?' began Mary, in her low, measured tones, though her voice shook more than usual. 'Have you seen these disastrous tidings from the Cape? Oh, Mr. Hardingstone, we are all in despair! Charles Kettering has in all probability been—' she could not bring herself to say it—'at least he is missing—missing, gracious Heaven! in that fearful country!—and we have only heard of it this morning. The General is incapable of acting; he is completely paralyzed by the blow; and I have come—forgive me, Mr. Hardingstone—I have come to you as our only friend, to ask your advice and assistance; to entreat you to—to—' poor Mary broke down, and went into a passionate fit of weeping, all the more violent from having been so long restrained.

Frank was horrified at the intelligence; he made a grasp at the paper, and there, sure enough, his worst fears were confirmed. But this was no time for the indulgence of helpless regret; and when Mary was sufficiently composed, he asked her, with a strange, meaning anxiety, 'How Blanche bore the fatal tidings?' Heart of man! what depths of selfishness are there in thy chambers! At the back of all his sorrow for his more than brother, at the back of all his anxiety and horror, he hated himself to know that there was a vague feeling of relief as if a load had

been taken off, an obstacle removed. He would have laid down his life for Charlie; had he been with him in the bush, he would have shed the last drop of his blood to defend him; yet now that his fate was ascertained, he shuddered to find that his grief was not totally unqualified; he loathed himself when he felt that through the dark there was a gleam somewhere that had a reflection of joy.

'Blanche's feelings, you may imagine,' replied Mary, now strangely, almost sternly, composed; 'she has lost a more than brother' (Frank winced); 'but of feelings it is not the time to talk. You may think me mad to say so, but something tells me there may still be a hope. He is not reported killed, or even wounded; he is 'missing;' there is a chance yet that he may be saved. These savages do not always kill their prisoners (she shuddered as she spoke); there is yet a possibility that he may have been taken and carried off to the mountains. An energetic man on the spot might even now be the means of preserving him from a hideous fate. These people must surely be amenable to bribes, like the rest of mankind. Oh, it is possible—in God's mercy it is possible—and we may get him back amongst us, like one from the dead.'

Frank grasped at her meaning in an instant; and even while he did so, he could not help remarking how beautiful she was—her commanding sorrow borne with such dignity and yet such resignation.

He drew down his brows, set his teeth firm, and the old expression came over his face which poor Charlie used to admire so much—an expression of grim unblenching resolve.

'You 're right, Mrs. Delaval, it might be done,' he said, slowly and deliberately. 'How long has the mail taken to come to England—twenty-eight days?—the same going out. It is a desperate chance: yet would it be a satisfaction to know the worst. Poor boy!—poor Charlie!—game to the last, I see in the general orders. What think ye, Mrs. Delaval; would it be any use?'

'If I was a man,' replied Mary, 'I should be in the train for Southampton at this moment.'

Frank rang the bell; the waiter appeared with an alacrity that looked as if he had been listening at the keyhole. 'Bring my bill,' said Frank to that astonished functionary, 'and have a cab at the door in twenty minutes.'

'You are going, Mr. Hardingstone?' said Mary, clasping her hands; 'God bless you for it!'

'I am going,' replied Frank, putting the short pipe carefully away, and pulling out the small black portmanteau.

'You will start to-day?' asked Mary, with an expression of admiration on her sorrowing countenance for a decision of character so in accordance with her own nature.

'In twenty minutes,' replied Frank, still packing

for hard life; and he was as good as his word. His things were ready; his bill paid; his servant furnished with the necessary directions during his master's absence; and himself in the cab, on his way to his bankers, and from thence to the railway station, in exactly twenty minutes from the moment of his making up his mind to go.

'Tell Blanche I'll bring him back safe and sound,' said he, as he shook hands with Mary on the hotel-steps; 'and—and—tell her,' he added, with a deeper tint on his bronzed, manly cheek, 'tell her that I—I had no time to wish her good-bye.'

We question whether this was exactly the message Frank intended to give; but this bold fellow, who could resolve at a moment's notice to undertake a long, tedious voyage, to penetrate to the seat of war in a savage country, and, if need were, to risk his life at every step for the sake of his friend, had not courage to send a single word of common-place gallantry to a timid, tender girl. So it is—Hercules is but a cripple in sight of Omphale—Sampson turns faint-hearted in the lap of Delilah—nor are these heroes of antiquity the only champions who have wittingly placed their brawny necks beneath a small white foot, and been surprised to find it could spurn so fiercely, and tread so heavily. Mary should have loved such a man as Frank, and *vice versâ*—here was the *beau idéal* that each had formed of the opposite sex. Frank was never tired of crying-up a woman of

energy and courage, one who could dare and suffer, and still preserve the queenly dignity which he chose to esteem woman's chiefest attraction; and so he neglected the gem, and set his great, strong heart upon the flower. Well, we have often seen it so; we *admire* the diamond, but we *love* the rose. As for Mary, she was, if possible, more inconsistent still. As she walked back to Grosvenor-square, she thought over the heroic qualities of Mr. Hardingstone, and wondered how it was possible he should yet remain unmarried. 'Such a man as that,' thought Mary, revolving in her own mind his manifold good qualities, 'so strong, so handsome, so clever, so high-minded, he has all the necessary ingredients that make up a great man; how simple in his habits, and how frank and unaffected in his manner! a woman might acknowledge *him* as a superior indeed! Mind to reflect; head to plan; and energy to execute! She would be *proud* to love him, to cling to him, and look up to him, and worship him. And Blanche has known him from a child, and never seen all this!' and a pang smote Mary's heart, as she recollected *why*, in all probability, Blanche had been so blind to Frank Hardingstone's attractions; and how *she*, of all people, could not blame her for her preference of another: and then the fair young face and the golden curls rose before her mind's eye like a phantom; and she turned sick as she thought it might even now be mouldering in the earth. Then Mary pulled a letter

from her pocket, and looked at it almost with loathing, as the past came back to her like the shade of a magic-lantern. She saw the gardens at Bishop's Baffler; the officers in undress uniform, and the grey charger; the evening walks; the quiet summer twilight; the steeple-chase at Guyville; and her eyes filled with tears, and she softened to another's miseries, as she reflected on her own. 'Selfish, unprincipled as he is,' thought Mary, 'he must love me, or he never would make such an offer as this. And what am I, that I should spurn the devotion of any human being? Have not I, too, been selfish and unprincipled, in allowing my mind to dwell alone on him who in reality belonged to another? Have I not cherished and encouraged the poison?—have I not yielded to the temptation?—do I wish even now that it was otherwise?—and am I not rightly punished?—have I not suffered less than I deserve?—and yet how miserable I am—how lonely and how despairing!—there is not another being on earth as miserable as I am!'

'By your leave, ma'am,' said a rough, coarse voice; and Mary stepped aside to make way on the pavement for a little mournful procession that was winding gloomily along, in strange, chilling contrast to the bustle and liveliness of the street. It was a little child's funeral. The short black coffin, carried so easily on one man's shoulder, seemed almost like a plaything for death. It was touching to think what a

tiny body was covered by that scanty pall—how the little thing, once so full of life and laughter, all play and merriment and motion, could be lying stiff and stark in death!' It seemed such a contradiction to the whole course of nature. A streamlet turning back towards its source—a rosebud nipped by the frost. Had the grim reaper no other harvest whitening for his sickle? Was there not age, with its aches, and pains, and burdens, almost asking for release? Was there not manhood, full of years and honours, its appointed task done on earth, its guerdon fairly earned, itself waiting for the reward? Was there not crime, tainting the atmosphere around it, that to take away would be a mercy to its fellow-men, and a deserved punishment to its own hardened obstinacy, having neglected and set aside every opportunity of repentance and amendment? Was there not virtue willing to go, and misery imploring to be set free? And must he leave all these, and cut off the little creeping tendril that had wound and twisted itself round its mother's heart? There was the mother first in the slow procession—who had so good a right to be chief mourner as that poor, broken woman? who can estimate the aching void that shall never be quite filled up in that sobbing, weary breast? She is not thinking of the funeral, nor the passers-by, nor the crape, nor the mourning; she does not hear rough condolences from neighbours, and well-meant injunctions 'to keep up,' and 'not

to give way so,' from those who 'are mothers themselves, and know what a mother's feelings *is*.' She is thinking of her child—her child shut down in that deal-box—yet still hers—she has got it still—not till it is consigned to earth, and the dull clods rattle heavily on the lid, will she feel that she has lost it altogether, when there will come a fearful reaction, and paroxysms of grief that deaden themselves by their own violence; and then the wound will cicatrize, and she will clean her house, and get her husband's dinner, and sit down to her stitching, and neighbours will think she has 'got over her trouble,' and she will seem contented, and even happy. But the little one will not be forgotten. When the flowers are blooming in the spring—when the voices of children are ringing in the street—when a strain of music comes plaintively up the noisy alley—when the sun is bright in heaven—when the fire is crackling on the hearth—then will her lost cherub stretch its little arms in Paradise, and call its mother home.

As Mary made way for the poor afflicted woman, who for an instant withdrew from her mouth the coarse handkerchief that could not stifle her sobs, she recognised Blanche's former maid, poor Gingham. Yes, it was Mrs. Blacke, following her only child, her only treasure, her only consolation, to the grave. Poor thing, her sin had been too heavy for her to bear; with her husband's example daily before her

eyes, what wonder that she strove to stifle her conscience in intoxication? Then came 'from bad to worse, from worst to worst of all;' the child was neglected, and, a ricketty, sickly infant at all times, soon pined away, and sickened, and died. The mother was well-nigh maddened with the thought that it *might* have been saved. Never will she forgive herself for that one night when she left it alone for two hours, and coming back, found the fever had taken it. Never will she drive from her mind the little, convulsed limbs, and the rolling eyes, that looked upward, ever upward, and never recognized her again. And now her home is desolate, her husband is raving in the hospital, and her child is in that pauper-coffin which she is following to the grave. Mary Delaval, do you still think you are the most miserable being on the face of the earth?

CHAPTER XX.

Dawn in the East.

MILITARY CRITICISMS—GARE LES FEMMES!—THE MAJOR AT HOME—A BITTER PILL—'I AM A-WEARY'—VERY NEAR THE BORDER—DAY DAWNS IN THE EAST—THE BETTER ANGEL—A BRAIN FEVER—A SICK-NURSE IN SPURS.

''GAD, I thought the Major was very crusty this morning,' remarked Cornet Capon, as he removed a large cigar from his lips, and watched its fragrant volume curling away into the summer air. 'How he gave it you, Clank, about leading the column so fast, and again for riding that old trooper, instead of your own charger. I can't help thinking D'Orville's altered somehow; he used to be such a cheery fellow.'

'*You* needn't talk, my boy,' retorted Captain Clank to his subaltern; 'I heard him tell you that if you would attend a little more to your *covering* and less to your *overalls*, you would be quite as ornamental, and a good deal more useful, to the regiment; but I agree with you—he *is* altered. He's like all the rest of 'em—a capital fellow till you get him in command, and then he's crotchety and cantankerous, and devilish disagreeable. Give us another weed.'

These young officers were not very busy; they

were occupied in, perhaps, the most wearisome of all the duties that devolve on the Dragoon, and their task consisted in lounging about a troop-stable, attired in undress uniform, to watch the men cleaning and 'doing up' their respective horses. They could but smoke, and talk over the morning's field-day to while away the time. Neither of them was encumbered with an undue proportion of brains—neither of them could have engaged in a much deeper discussion than that which they now carried on; yet they did their duty scrupulously, they loved the regiment as a home, and looked upon the B Troop as their family; and although their thoughts ran a little too much on dress, fox-hunting, driving, and other less harmless vanities, they were, after all, good comrades and tolerably harmless members of society. Cornet Capon's ideas oozed out slowly, and only under great pressure, so he smoked half a cigar in solemn silence ere he resumed, with a wise look.

'There's something at the bottom of all this about the Major, Clank. Did you notice where he halted us after the charge—all amongst that broken ground at the back of the Heath. We shall have half the horses in the troop lame to-morrow.'

'Old 'Trumpeter' was lame to-day,' returned Clank, with a grim smile, 'and that's why D'Orville was so savage with me for riding him. You're right, Capon. The Major's amiss—there's a screw loose somewhere, I'm sure of it, and I'm sorry for it.'

'He lost 'a cracker' at Newmarket last week, I *know*,' said Capon, thoughtfully; 'I shouldn't wonder if he was obliged to go—let me see—Lipstrap 'll get the majority, and I shall get my lieutenancy. Well, I shall be sorry to lose him, though he *does* blow me up.'

'Pooh! man, it's not *that*,' rejoined Clank, who was a man of a sentimental turn of mind, and kept Tommy Moore in his barrack-room. 'You young ones are always thinking about racing. I've known D'Orville hit a deal harder than that and never wince. Why, I recollect he played a civilian, at Calcutta, for his commission and appointments against the other's race-horses and a bungalow he had up in the hills. 'Gad, sir, he won the stud and the crib too—and not only that, but I landed a hundred gold mohrs by backing his new lot for the Governor-General's Cup, and went and stayed a fortnight with him at his country-house, besides—best billet *I* ever had—furniture, and fittings, and fixings, all just as t'other fellow left them. No—D'Orville's as game as a pebble about money—it isn't *that*.'

Cornet Capon opened his eyes, smoked sedulously for about five minutes, and then asked Clank, 'What the devil there was to bother a fellow, if it was'nt money?'

'Women,' replied the Captain, looking steadily at his companion; 'women, my boy. I've watched the thing working now ever since I was a cornet, and I

never knew a good fellow thoroughly broke down that there wasn't a woman at the bottom of it. Now, look at Lacquers; when Lacquers came to us, there wasn't such another cheery fellow in the Hussar-Brigade—it did me good to see Lacquers drink that '34 we finished in Dublin—and as for riding, there wasn't another heavy-weight in that country could see *the way he went*—and now look what he's arrived at. Never dines at mess—horses gone to Tattersall's—sits and mopes in his barrack-room, or else off to London at a moment's notice—and closeted all day with agents and men-of-business—and what is it that's brought him to this pass? Why, that girl he wants to marry, who won't have anything to say to him—and why she won't is more than I can tell, unless she's got a richer chap in tow somewhere else. Capon, my boy, you're younger than me, and you've got most of your troubles to come. Take my advice, and stick to the regiment, and horses, and hunting, and that, but keep clear of women; they're all alike—only the top-sawyers are the most mischievous—you keep clear of 'em all, for if you don't you'll be sorry for it—mark my words if you're not.'

This was a long speech for the Captain, and he was quite out of breath at its conclusion; but the Cornet did not entirely agree with him. He had got a *tendresse* down in the West—a saucy, blue-eyed cousin, whose image often came before the lad's eyes in his barrack-room, and his revelry, and his boyish

dissipation, so he contented himself with remarking profoundly that—'Women were so different, it was impossible to lay down any general rule about them any more than horses; and expressing his conviction that, whatever might be the secret grief preying upon the Major's spirits, it could have nothing to do with the fair sex, 'for you know, Clank, D'Orville's a devilish *old* fellow—why he must be forty if he 's a day.'

So the pair jingled into the mess-room to have some luncheon, and ordered their buggy, to drive up to London afterwards and spend the rest of the day in the delights of the metropolis—since this it is which makes Hounslow such a favourite quarter with these light-hearted sons of the sword.

The Major was altered certainly, not only in temper, but even in appearance. He had got to look quite aged in the last few weeks. How strange it is that Time, so gradual in its effects on the rest of creation, should make its ravages on man by fits and starts, by sudden assaults, so to speak, and *coups de main*, instead of the orderly and graduated process of blockade. We see a 'wonderfully young-looking man'—we watch him, year by year, still as fresh in colour, still as upright in figure and as buoyant in spirits as we recollect him when we were boys—we admire his vigour—we envy him his constitution, and we make minute enquiries as to his daily habits and mode of life—'he never drank anything but sherry' perhaps, and forthwith we resolve that sherry is the

true elixir vitæ. All at once something happens—he loses one that he loves—or he has a dangerous illness—or, perhaps, only meets with severe pecuniary losses and disappointments. When we see him again, lo! a few weeks have done the work of years. The ruddy cheek has turned hollow and wrinkled—the merry eye is dim—the strong frame bent and wasted—the man is old in despite of the sherry; and youth, when once she spreads her wings, comes back no more to light upon the withered branch.

Hair has turned grey in a single night. We ourselves can recall an instance of a young girl whose mother died suddenly, and under circumstances of touching pathos. Her daughter, who was devotedly attached to her, was completely stupified by the blow. All night long she sat with her head resting on her hand, and her long, black tresses falling neglected over the arm that supported her throbbing temples. When the day dawned she moved and withdrew her hand. One lock of hair that had remained pressed between her unconscious fingers had turned as *white as snow*. That single lock never recovered its natural hue. Like the Eastern virgins it mourned in white for a mother.

Well, the Major looked old and worn, as he sat in his lonely barrack-room, surrounded by many a trophy of warlike triumph or sporting success. Here was the sabre he had taken from the body of that Sikh chief, whom he cut down at the critical moment

when, six horses' length ahead of the squadron he was leading, he had been forced to hew his way single-handed through his swarming foes. There, spread out on a rocking-chair, was the royal tiger skin perforated by a single bullet, that vouched for the cool hand and steady eye which had stretched the grim brute on the earth as he crouched for his fatal bound. On the chimney-piece those enormous tusks recalled many a stirring burst over the arid plains of the Deccan, when the boldest riders in India thought it no shame to yield the 'first spear' to 'the Flying Captain,' as they nick-named our daring hussar. Nor were these exploits confined to the East alone. On the verdant plains of merry England had not Sanspareil, ridden by his owner, distanced the cream of Leicestershire in a steeple-chase, never to be forgotten whilst the Whissendine runs downwards from its source; and did not that spirited likeness of the gallant animal hang worthily above the Cup that commemorated his fame? Yes, the Major had earned his share of the everyday laurels men covet so earnestly, and truly it was only opportunity that was wanting to twine an undying leaf or two amongst the wreath. Yet did he look haggard, and *old*, and unhappy. His hair and moustaches had become almost grey now, and as he sat leaning his head upon his hand with an open letter on his knee, the strong fingers would clench themselves, and the firm jaw gnash ever and anon, as

though the thoughts within were goading him more than he could bear. Like some gallant horse that feels the armed heel stirring his mettle the while he champs and frets against the light pressure of the restraining bit, a touch too yielding for him to face, too maddening for him to overcome, so the Major chafed and struggled, and while he scorned himself for his weakness, submitted to the power that was stronger than he; and though he strove, and sneered, and bore it with a grim, sardonic smile, was forced to own the pang that eat into his very heart.

'And this is what you have come to at last,' he said, almost aloud, as he rose and paced the narrow room, and halted opposite the looking-glass that seemed to reflect the image of his bitterest enemy; 'this is what you have come to at last. Fool—and worse than fool! After chances such as no man ever so threw away—after twenty years of soldiering, not without a certain share of distinction—with talents better than nine-tenths of the comrades who have far out-stripped you in the race—with a brilliant start in life, and wind and tide for years in your favour—with luck, opportunities, courage, and above all, experience, what have you done? and what have you arrived at? Three words in a despatch which is forgotten—a flash or two of the spurious, ephemeral fame that gilds a daring action or a sporting feat—the reputation of being a moderately good drill in the field, and a chance word of approbation from fools,

whom you know that you despise. Truly a fair exchange—a most equal barter. This proud position you have purchased with a lifetime of energy spent in vain, and that thorough self-contempt, which is now your bitterest punishment. Money, too, what sums you have wasted, lavished upon worse than trifles—but let that pass. Had you the same fortune and the same temptations you would spend it all again. The dross is not to be regretted; but oh! the time—the time—the buoyancy of youth, the vigour of manhood that shall never come again. Fool! fool!' and the Major groaned aloud. 'And what have I lived for?' he added, as he sat himself down and leaned his head once more upon his hand, looking into his past life as the exile looks down from a hill upon the lights and shades of the cherished landscape he shall see no more. 'I have lived for self, and I have my reward. Have I ever done one single action for a fellow-creature, save to indulge my own feelings? have I not schemed and flattered, and worked and dared all for self? and this is the upshot. The first time I try to do a disinterested action—the first time I strive to break from the fetters of a lifetime to be free, to be *a man*, I am foiled, and scouted, and spurned. Refused!—refused! by a poor governess—ha! ha!—it is, indeed, too good a joke. Gaston D'Orville on his knees, at forty, a grey, old fool—on his knees to a wretched, dependent governess, and she refuses him. By all

the demons in hell—if there *is* a hell—it serves him right. Laugh! who can help laughing? And yet what a woman to lose—a woman who could write such a letter as this—a woman who knows me better, far better than I know myself—she would have shared with me every dream of ambition—she would have appreciated and encouraged the few efforts I have ever made to be good—she would have understood me, and with her I could have been happy even in a cottage—but no! forsooth. Her mightiness, doubtless, thinks the poor Major of Hussars pretty nearly ruined by this time, no such great catch. And is she not right? What am I after all, that I should expect any human being to give up everything for *me?* Broken-down, old, worn-out, if not in body, at least utterly out-wearied and used-up in mind, why should I cumber the earth? Gaston, my boy, you have played out your part—you have got to the end of your tether—'tis time for the curtain to drop—'tis time to lie down and go to sleep—there is not much to regret here—you have seen everything this dull world has to show. Now for 'fresh fields and pastures new'—at all events the waking will be glorious excitement—to find out the grand secret at last—where will it be, and how? I might know in ten minutes—many an old friend is there now—not badly off for company at any rate—there was poor Harry, the night before we were engaged at Chillianwallah, he thought he was *there.* How well I

remember him, as he told me his dream just before we went into action. He thought he was disembodied—floating, floating away through the blue night sky—hovering over the sea—bathing in the moonlight—flitting amongst the stars, and ever he got lighter and lighter, and ever he rose higher and higher, till he reached a cool, quiet garden without a breeze or a sound, and there he saw his mother walking, as he remembered her before she died, when he was yet a child. And she placed her hand upon his brow, and the thin, transparent hand clove through him, for he, too, was a spirit, till it struck chill like ice around his heart, and he awoke. Poor Harry, I saw him go down with a musket-shot through his temples; and he knows all about it, too, now. Pain! the pain is nothing. A dislocated ankle is far more acute agony than it would take to kill an elephant—'tis but a touch to a trigger, and the thing's done.

D'Orville got up coolly, and calmly walked across the room, took a certain oblong mahogany box from under his writing-table, and quietly unlocking it, drew his hand along the smooth, shining barrel of a pistol. He examined it well, pricked the touch-hole, shook the powder well up into the nipple, and then, having wiped the weapon almost caressingly, laid it down on the table at his elbow, and pursued his reflections, more at ease now that he had prepared everything for his escape.

'Well, it can be done in a moment, so there need

be no hurry about it. In the meantime let me see—I should like to leave some remembrances to the fellows in the regiment. There's that sabre—how game the old white-bearded chief died—I almost wish I hadn't cut him down. 'Faith, I shall see him too. I expect he won't give me so warm a welcome as Harry—it's a pity I can't take him his sword back again. Well, Lacquers always admired it, and I'll leave it him. Poor Lacquers, he's a good fellow, though a fool. I'll leave a note too, asking him to take care of the white horse, and shoot him when he's done with him: let him follow his master, poor old fellow! Yes; there's very little to arrange—one advantage in having got through a good property. I don't think there'll be much quarrelling over *my* will. And now, to consider the journey. I must have been very near it often before, and yet, somehow, I never looked at it in that light. 'Tis a different thing in action, with the excitement of duty, and watching the enemy, and keeping the men in hand, and that confounded smoke preventing one from seeing what is going on. No, I've never been *quite* so near as now; but I must some day, even if I should put it off—I *must* go at last—and why not now? What matter whether at forty or seventy? Time is not to be reckoned by years. I am old, and fit for nothing else. When the fruit is ripe, it had better be plucked; why should people let it hang and rot, till it drops off the tree, all spoilt and

decayed? How do I know I may not want some of my manly energy where I am going? *Going*—how strange it sounds! Well, now to ticket the sabre, and write a line to poor Lacquers'—(D'Orville indited a few words in his firm, bold hand, if anything, firmer and bolder than usual)—'and now for 'a leap in the dark'—face the Styx, if there be such a place, just like any other *yawner*: and so, steady, steady!'

His hand was on the pistol—the lock clicked sharp and true up to the cock—one touch of the trigger, and where would Gaston D'Orville have been?—when his eye chanced to light upon the seal of Mary's letter. It was a casual seal, accidentally selected from a number of others, but the device was somewhat uncommon, and now struck D'Orville with a strange, painful distinctness that surprised him. It was but an eye, surrounded by an obliterated motto; yet it served for an instant to divert his attention; and—on such trifles turns the destiny of man—he laid down the pistol, and took up the letter to examine it more closely. The eye seemed to fascinate him. Turn which way he would, that eye seemed to watch him; steadily, unremittingly, an eye that never closes or slumbers seemed to be above him, around him, all about him. He rose from his chair, and still the eye followed him; he walked to the window, and the eye watched him steadily from out the blue summer sky. A trumpet-note pealed from the rear of the building; it was one of those merry

stable-calls so dear to every cavalry soldier's heart. The familiar strain brought D'Orville to himself; the tension of his brain relaxed. As the excitement subsided, the visionary disappeared, and the real resumed its sway over strong nerves and a powerful intellect. Mechanically he put the pistols away, and carefully locked them in their case. Still the eye seemed to be watching him; and a vague feeling of shame began to take possession of him, as the suspicion rose in his mind that there was *cowardice* at the bottom of the resolution which he had made, as he thought so boldly, a few minutes ago.

D'Orville was a naturally brave man, and the force of habit and education had taught him to scorn anything in the shape of fear, as the vilest of all degradation. To betray a woman, in his code might be venial enough; but to shrink from aught in earth, or heaven, or hell, was a stain upon his honour *not* to be thought of. In his career of active service he had seen the advantage of courage too often, had discovered too frequently how much more rare a quality it is than is generally supposed, not to appreciate its value, and worship it as an idol, although conscious of possessing it himself. It now dawned upon him that suicide was after all but a desperate method of running away—that the sentry had no right to desert his post until regularly relieved. By-the-bye, in Mary's letter was there not something about warfare as compared to religion ?—some parallel drawn

between the Christian and the soldier? Again he perused that letter carefully, attentively, word for word: but the bitterness was past; the writer was no longer the poor governess, spurning a suitor whom she ought to have been proud to accept, but the high-minded, pure-hearted woman, feeling for his sorrows, appreciating his good qualities, and pointing out to him those consolations which for her could take the sting from earth's most envenomed shafts. One or two expressions reminded him of his mother—the mother he had loved and lost as a boy. Again he seemed to see that gentle lady bending her graceful head over him, as she spoke of other worlds, and other duties, and other pleasures, totally unconnected with this lower earth. He remembered the very gown she wore; he seemed to hear her low, sweet, serious tones, as she called him 'my darling boy,' and insisted on those miraculous stories which she was herself fully persuaded were truths, and which the boy drank in, childlike, nothing doubting. Ah! what if they should be true after all? What if the whole history should be something more than a legend of priestcraft, an old woman's fable? D'Orville had thought but little on such matters; he had heard them discussed by clever men of opposite opinions, and it never struck him that either side could demonstrate very satisfactorily the futility of the adversary's arguments; but he was wise enough to know that the boasted human intellect has but a

narrow horizon, that 'the two-foot dwarf' sees little beyond the garden-wall, and that 'there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.' Here were the only two beings he had ever *respected* in the world, shaping their whole conduct, as they formed all their opinions upon circumstances which they seemed to believe facts, as firmly as they believed in their own identity. Well, what of that? These might be facts or they might not. But stay: was there not something wanting in the whole scheme and constitution of life, as he had tried it? Could any man have had better chances of being happy here than he had had? Was he happy? Was he satisfied? Was there not always a shadow somewhere athwart the sunlight? Was there not always a craving for something more? As a boy, he longed to be an officer; no sooner was that distinction gained, than he longed for fame, first in the boyish arena of mere field-sports, then in the daring exploits of real war. Had he not for a time drank his fill of both? and was his thirst quenched? Could he sit down, '*uti conviva satur*' and say 'Enough'? No, no, he knew it too well. Then came the daily craving for excitement—that longing for a something unattainable, which, more than all besides, argues the inferiority of our present state—the necessity for a *to-morrow*, even when the sun of to-day has for us set its last. Well, had he not wooed excitement in all her haunts? Had he not gambled, and raced,

and speculated, and shone in the world of fashion, and sunned himself in the smiles of Beauty? And had not the goddess ever fleeted away when just within his grasp? Was not his heart still empty, his desire unslaked? Even had he not endured this disappointment—had the only woman he really loved consented to be his—did he not feel in his innermost soul, was he not forced to confess to himself, that still there would have been a want?—still would to-morrow have been the goal, still to-day but the journey. Yes, disguise it how he might, deaden his sensations with what opiates he would, he could not but own, that hitherto his world had been 'stale, flat, and unprofitable.' Had he not been so weary of life, that he had voluntarily, even now, been within the wag of a finger of laying it down, to go he cared not whither, so as it was anywhere but here?

Then if there was nothing in the present that could satisfy his soul, might he not presume that there was a future for which it was specially created and intended? Yes, there might be something to live for after all—there might be a career in which to win more than fame and more than honour—which at any rate should satisfy those longings and aspirations here, and might be the portal to such a glorious hereafter, as he could not even picture to his world-wearied imagination—and if so, what scheme so probable, what religion so well supported by historical proof and logical deduction, as that which he had

learnt at his mother's knee? One by one, thoughts came back to him that had lain dormant for more than thirty years; one by one he recalled the miraculous facts, the touching sufferings that had awed his boyish imagination, and moved his boyish heart. For the first time for more than thirty years, he thought as a reality of the Great Example who never quailed, nor flinched, nor shrank one jot from His superhuman task. Did he admire courage? There was One who had faced the legions of hell, unaided and alone, with but human limbs and a human heart to support Him through the dread encounter. Did he admire constancy? There was One who voluntarily endured the obloquy of the world, the agonies of the most painful death, and moved not an eyelash in complaint or reproach. Did he admire self-denial —that most heroic of all heroism? What had that One given up, to walk a-foot through this miserable world, with such a prospect as the close of his earthly career!—and for whom?—even for him amongst the rest—for him who till this very moment had never thanked Him, never acknowledged Him, never so much as thought of Him. The strong man's heart was touched, the well was unsealed in the desert, and as the tears gushed from his unaccustomed eyes, Gaston D'Orville bent the knees that had not bent for half a lifetime; and can we doubt that he was forgiven?

* * * *

In four-and-twenty hours D'Orville was laid upon his small camp-bedstead in a brain fever. The excitement of his late life, the reaction consequent on his abandonment of his awful resolution; the strong revulsion of feeling into which we have no right to pry, had been too much for a constitution already shaken by years of dissipation and hard service beneath an Indian sun; and for days together life and death trembled in the balance so evenly that it seemed a single grain might turn the scale. And of all his comrades, who was it that watched at his bedside with the attention, almost the tenderness, of a woman? sitting up by him at night, giving him his medicine, smoothing his pillow, and tending him with a brother's love—who, but Lacquers! the unmeaning, empty dandy—the fellow with but two ideas, his dress and his horses—the ignorant, grown-up schoolboy that could scarcely write his own name, but for all that, the stanch, unflinching comrade, the true-hearted, generous friend. When the lamp, after flickering, and fading, and well nigh dying out altogether, began once more to flame up pretty steadily, and the Major, gaunt and grim, with nearly white moustaches, and a black skull-cap, and haggard. hollow cheeks, began to experience the superhuman appetite of convalescence, and the wonderful longing for open air and country scenery, and such simple, natural pleasures, which invariably comes over those who have been near the confines of Life and Death,

as though they brought back with them from that mysterious border-land the earlier instincts of childhood; when, in short, the Major was getting better, and could sit at his window and see the white charger go to exercise, or the regiment get under arms below, many and long were the conversations between him and Lacquers on the thoughts and feelings which almost insensibly had sprung up in each of them. Lacquers did not conceal his disappointment as regarded Blanche. Poor fellow, he had made her an honest, disinterested offer, and it had not entered into his calculations that he might be repulsed.

'I know I'm not good enough for her, D'Orville,' the humbled dandy would sigh, as he poured his griefs into his friend's ear. 'I'm not very 'blue,' and that sort of thing, though I suppose I've got natural talents just like other fellows; but I stood by her when all the rest gave way, and I was the only one amongst 'em that really liked her for herself and not for her money. Why, you yourself, D'Orville (the Major winced), you yourself never made up to her after you heard of the smash, nor Mount Helicon, nor Uppy, nor any of 'em; to be sure she had refused Uppy; do you remember how glum he looked that night at 'The Peace?' but I don't believe he'd have proposed to her ten days later. She might have liked me much better when she came to know me—mightn't she? and I would have read history, and grammar, and Latin, and Greek,

and that, and made myself a scholar for her sake. I can't help feeling it, Major, and that's the truth. She's the only woman I ever really cared for; and what have I to live for now ?'

Then it was that D'Orville showed himself an altered man—then it was that the thoughts which had first flashed across him, when he contemplated self-destruction, and had since been progressively developing themselves on a bed of sickness, bore their fruit, as such thoughts will sooner or later where a man has a heart to feel or a brain to reason. He explained to Lacquers the views he now entertained of life, its duties, and its charms, how different from those on which he had hitherto acted. He pointed out to him the utter insufficiency of everything on earth to constitute happiness, when unconnected with a grand object and a future state of being. He talked well, for he was in earnest—and he reasoned closely, for his was a penetrating intellect, ever ready to strip at a moment's notice the illusive from the real. He had all his life been an acute man —saw through a fallacy in an instant, and to do him justice, never hesitated to expose it.

Called knavery, knavery—and a lie, a lie.

Such a mind, when convinced of truth, is doubly strong, and Lacquers listened, much admiring, though it must be confessed, not always quite understanding the deductions of his Mentor. Yet was he, too, ere

long, stirred with a noble ambition, a desire to fulfil his destiny in life with some credit to himself and benefit to his fellow-creatures—a longing to be useful in his generation—to feel that he was part of the great scheme, and however humble might be his task, yet that its fulfilment was a fair condition of his very existence and was conducive to the well-being of the whole.

'But what can I do, however willing I am?' he would say. 'An officer of hussars cannot be a Methodist preacher, or even a moral philosopher, without doing more harm than good. If I thought I had talents for it, and eloquence and learning, I'd sell out to-morrow, and go to South Africa as a missionary, or anywhere else—Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, anything rather than be a useless drone cumbering the earth in a life without an aim.'

'Not the least occasion for that,' replied D'Orville. 'Fortune—accident—call it rather Providence—has placed you in a certain station, and it is fit for you to fulfil the duties of that station without repining or restlessness, because, forsooth, it does not happen to square exactly with some vague notions of your own. You may do a deal of good, though you *are* an officer of hussars. Why should a soldier be necessarily an irreligious or an immoral man? It is not his profession that should bear the blame, however convenient it may be to make the red coat a scape-goat. We must have troops. We cannot be

secure from war. Do you suppose a man leading a squadron gallantly against an enemy, doing the best he can for all—cool, confident, and daring—is not fulfilling his duty every whit as well as he who is on his knees in the rear praying for his success the while. Our calling bids us look death in the face oftener than other men, and that very fact should give us trust in Him on whom alone we can depend at the last gasp. We are always nearer His presence than those who are not so exposed, and, for my part, I think it a proud and honourable privilege. Then in barracks, may you not improve the *morale* of all about you in a thousand ways? You may look to the bodily well-being of your troop. Why?—first, because it's your duty, and, secondly, because its a pleasure to you, and a credit to have them smart, and clean, and well-disciplined! Why should you totally neglect their minds? They, too, have a future as well as a present. The one is not less a reality than the other. Ay, it's startling enough, because people slur it over, and don't talk of it, or allow themselves to think of it, but it's none the less true for all that. You may shut your own eyes as close as you please, but you won't prevent the sun from shining just the same. I grant you that the task is a difficult one. So much the more credit in fulfilling it, by an effort that does require some sacrifice and some self-denial. I have lived forty years in this world for *myself*. The careless, thoughtless life

that a tolerably sagacious dog might have led—and I have never been really happy. Come what may, I hope to do so no more. I have found out the true secret that turns everything to gold, and I don't grudge a share of my good fortune to my friends.'

'You're right, D'Orville,' said Lacquers, shaking the Major by the hand; 'you're right, though I never looked at it in that light before. I see that I have an object in life—that I have a task to perform; and I see—no, I don't see my way quite through it; but I trust I shall have courage and patience to do the best I can. D'Orville, I feel happier than I did. I'm not much of a bookworm, and I can't quite express what I feel; but, old fellow, you talked of exchanging, and going to India; well, I'll go too—we'll get appointed into the same corps—I'm good enough to be broiled in that country, at any rate—and I'll never leave you, old boy, for you're the best friend I ever had!' Little Blanche Kettering might have done worse than take poor, ignorant, good-looking, blundering, warm-hearted Lacquers.

CHAPTER XXI.

Hospital.

DOWN AMONGST THE DEAD MEN—CHARLIE'S PRESERVER—A SICK MAN'S VISIONS—MENTAL PROSTRATION—THE DYING MAN'S GUESTS—DISCHARGED WITHOUT A PENSION—LEADEN HOURS—HOW'S THE PATIENT?—'WELCOME, FRANK'—HOMEWARD BOUND.

WE left 'Cousin Charlie,' some chapters back, in a sufficiently unpleasant predicament. His arm broken by a bullet, a Kaffir's *assegai* through his shoulder, stunned, moreover, by a crashing blow from the butt-end of a musket (Birmingham made, and sold in the gross at nineteen shillings a-piece), not to mention a roll of some fifty feet down an almost perpendicular ravine, the boy lay senseless, and to all appearance dead. The tide of war rolled far away from the *kloof* that had been defended so fiercely, and won with such loss of life, and ere the young Lancer had recovered his senses, an outlying band of the enemy, driven from their fastnesses far on the right, wound stealthily through this very ravine in full retreat. Fortunately, they had that day got such a taste of English discipline, as made them loth to improve any further acquaintance with 'Brown Bess,' and although they stripped the lad

from head to foot, believing him to be stone-dead, they had no time to stay and practise those horrid mutilations with which these demons signalize their triumph over a fallen foe. Not a shred of clothing, however, did they leave on the body; even his boots, the most useless articles conceivable to a Kaffir, were carried off as the spoils of war. For aught we know, to this day, Charlie's smart jacket forms the ceremonial dress of some burly chief. Very tight, and worn with long black legs, *au naturel*, it is, doubtless, a most imposing costume. Be that how it may, the white man was left naked, and weltering in his wounds, whilst the routed party, who had wasted but little time in stripping him, made the best of their way to a more respectful distance from the British posts. Charlie never stirred for hours. The moon rose, and bathed in her cold light the crisp, rugged scenery and the ghastly accessories of that fatal glen. Here, a stunted-jagged bush threw its smoke-blackened twigs athwart the clear night-sky, and beneath it, bleached by the moonlight, lay some grinning corpse, that had dragged itself there to die, whilst a clean musket-barrel shining in those pale beams, showed it had been a British soldier when morning dawned. There, hurled in a fantastic heap, lay the swarthy bodies of some half-dozen Kaffirs, one balanced on the verge of a blank, bare cliff, his arms and head dangling, limp and helpless, over the brink —his comrades piled above him, as they fell in their

desperate efforts to escape. Yonder, where the moonbeams glimmered through the twinkling foliage, frosting the leaves with silver, and shedding peace and beauty over the unholy scene, a Fingoe auxiliary stirred and groaned in his last mortal agony, his dusky skin welling forth its very life-drops on the trampled sward. Shout, and curse, and clanging blow, all the riot and confusion of the strife had long since died away. The writhing Fingoe groaned out his soul with a last gasping sigh, and, save for the short yelp of a famished jackal in the adjoining thicket, silence slept upon the glen, and Night shared with Death her dominion over that blood-stained, devastated spot. Charlie came to himself—not that he knew where he lay, or was conscious of aught save a numbed sense of pain, and a confused, stupified idea, first that he was in bed, then that he was on the deck of a ship, heaving and plunging over the rolling waters. As sensation gradually returned, an intolerable thirst, so fierce as to amount to positive agony, began to rage in his dry, choking throat; then, with that unaccountable instinct to rise which is the first impulse of a man who is knocked down, he made a sort of abortive, staggering effort to get to his feet, it is needless to say, in vain. The blood welled freshly from his wounds—the branches overhead spun round him, and he was again insensible. But the effort saved his life; the slight movement was seen, and in another instant a dark Fingoe girl

was kneeling over him, with her hand upon his heart. The poor young savage had been stealing distractedly through the glen, looking for the body of her lover. She had missed him from his hut at nightfall. She knew there had been a severe engagement, and, like a very woman, faithful even unto death, she had glided away in the darkness to seek him out, and succour him if wounded, mourn over him if succour should come too late. It was a woman that alone recognised the body of the last of the Saxon kings, on the fatal field of Hastings. When earl, and thane, and liegeman saw but a mangled, mutilated corpse, Edith, the swan-necked knew her lover and her lord. Keen was the eye, unerring was the instinct of affection, and Edith's fame lives in history and song; but our poor Fingoe girl was but a nameless savage, a wretched, ignorant heathen, debased almost to the level of the brute, yet she, too, had a woman's heart, and cherished a woman's love—she, too, recognised her barbarian lover, gashed and defaced by assegai and war-club, and it was whilst she wept and moaned over his mangled remains that her eye caught the stir of Charlie's white body, and her heart, softened by grief, bid her, woman-like, again come to the assistance of the suffering and the helpless. She threw a *kaross* over his naked body. Light-footed as an antelope, she darted to a neighbouring spring, shuddering the while, for that, too, was polluted with blood, and returned with a skin of the

clear, cold water. She bathed his brow and temples —she poured the grateful drops between his blackened lips—and as he groaned and stirred once more, she knew there was life in him yet. The huts of her countrymen (half-armed auxiliaries to the British force) were at no great distance, and, savage as she was, the maiden would not leave a fellow-creature, particularly such a good-looking one as Charlie, to die like a dog, without assistance. Her shapely limbs bore her rapidly back to her people. Alas! there was scarce a family amongst them that had not lost a member, and she soon returned with four stalwart Fingoes, who carried Charlie's senseless frame to their encampment, where they tended him with such knowledge of surgery as they possessed, far more efficient, despite of sundry charms and superstitions, than our College of Surgeons at home would easily believe. There were other wounded soldiers in the encampment, and Charlie, though not recognised, was judged to be an officer, and met with all the attention from these poor fellows that they could spare from their own sufferings. But it was to the Fingoe girl that, under Providence, he owed his life. Night and day she tended him like a child, and when, at length, a convoy arrived from head-quarters with a train of waggons to carry off all the sick to Fort Beaufort, it was with difficulty the poor savage maiden was dissuaded from accompanying him even into the distant settlements, and long and wistfully

she gazed after the waggon that bore her white charge out of her sight. Charlie had not yet recovered his consciousness, and had scarcely spoken; and when he did, muttered but a few incoherent words; yet the girl had saved his life, had nursed him in his agony, and it was hard to give him up!

When our hapless Lancer really came to himself, he was lying in a comfortable bed, with all the necessary appliances and alleviations for sickness, nowhere so efficient as in an English military hospital. His first sensation was one of pleasing languor, almost of luxury, in the new feeling of complete repose, for, in the Fingoe hut, and yet more in the jolting, slow-moving waggon, his powerless limbs had never been able to dispose themselves in *real* rest, and the change was positive delight. He was too weak to take any note of time or place—he was conscious of but one feeling, that of bodily ease, and he could no more undergo the mental exertion of recalling past events or judging from present circumstances, than he could play the physical one of getting out of bed. He knew he was bandaged—he knew he had not strength to stir a finger were it to save his life, nor did he wish to do so—he knew he was lying between clean sheets, in a bed somewhere; it seemed strange, for he had not been in a bed for so long, and he was quite satisfied to take things as they were, and gaze drowsily upon the wall, and hear a stealthy footfall in the room, far too languid to turn his head, and so drop off to sleep

again quite contentedly. And when the surgeon of the Light Bobs—a gallant fellow, whose only fault was that he never would keep his confounded lint, and bandages, and tourniquet, far enough in the rear—saw his patient in this second slumber, and listened to his soft breathing, and placed his finger on the fluttering, scarce-perceptible pulse, he stroked his chin, with a self-satisfied air, and smiled, and muttered to himself, 'He 'll do now, *I think*—not above twenty—young constitution—never drank, I'll be bound. It 's been touch-and-go; but I believe, now, he 'll pull through.'

So Charlie got over the crisis, and slept, and struggling hard with the ebbing tide, little by little gained ground and footing, and inch by inch, as it were, reached the shore.

As consciousness returned with returning strength, memory began to unravel its tangled skein of dim fantastic recollections, and by degrees the march, the engagement, the last brilliant charge, separated themselves from the ghastly moonlit glen, the dark phantom-shape that had saved him, the strange huts of the savages, and, above all, those excruciating sufferings in that jolting waggon. But with convalescence came the weary longing to be well, the restlessness of protracted confinement, the loathing of those tedious, monotonous days—their only event that unvarying meal—their only amusement to gaze upon the sunlight brightening that whitewashed

wall. How Charlie pined to feel the free, fresh breeze of out-of-doors; how horse and hound, and field-day, the bounding charger, the jovial march, the cheerful mess, seemed to mock him with their phantom-like delights, as his body lay pinioned and helpless on that loathed couch, and his mind went soaring away in vision after vision of waving woods, and rugged hills, and, above all, the glorious summer air, that he would fain have bathed in, like a lark, have drank into his very being as the true *elixir vitæ*.

Of serious thoughts as to his late proximity to another world, of gratitude for his narrow escape from death, we fear we must confess our patient was altogether innocent. The sick-bed is the last place in the world to promote such grave reflections; and those who trust to an illness as a means of making them better and wiser men, will generally find that they have leant upon a broken reed. The exhaustion of physical pain acts little more upon the body than the mind. The latter partakes of the languor which pervades its tenement, and has generally but strength to pine in helpless inactivity, and gaze idly on the balance of life and death, with scarce a wish even to turn the scale. If a man never reflects when well, still less can he expect to have power to do so when sick; and many a death-bed, we fear, has owed its tranquillity to the mere prostration, intellectual as well as physical, which quiets the departing sufferer.

'Tis an uncomfortable notion; but we hold it too true, nevertheless. Charlie had an instance in his very next neighbour, a gallant private of the Light Bobs, who occupied the adjoining bed to our young Lancer. He, too, had been shot down in the fatal ravine, had been nursed in the Fingoe huts, and forwarded to Fort Beaufort in the waggon-train. For a time his wounds went on favourably enough, and he seemed to have a far better chance of recovery than poor Charlie. But he had been a drunkard in early life; his constitution was sapped with strong liquor; something unintelligible 'supervened,' as the medical officer said; and the man was doomed—doomed, as surely as if he had been sentenced to death by court-martial.

In the earliest stages of his own recovery, Charlie would lie and listen to the poor fellow's ravings, till he shuddered at the wild imaginings of that delirious brain. Now the man would fancy himself back in England, amongst the low haunts of vice and debauchery which seemed most familiar to his mind. He would shout out ribald toasts and drinking-songs, and roar fierce oaths of mingled pain and exultation, till he roused every pale inmate of the ward. Then would a frightful reaction take place, and he would lie still as a corpse, hand and foot, but mutter and roll his eyes, and gnash his teeth, like one possessed. He peopled the place, too, with frightful apparitions; amongst which, a pale girl, with her throat cut from

ear to ear, and the enemy of mankind seemed, by his expressions, to be the most frequent visitors. With these he would hold long conversations, ludicrous even through their horrors, and would display much ingenuity in their imaginary questions, to which he poured forth voluble answers of abuse and blasphemy. Of his Satanic disputant he generally seemed to get the better, by his own account; but the mutilated girl always brought on a fit of trembling that was frightful to behold. Once, after a visit from this spectre, which he detailed at considerable length, he tore all the bandages from his wounds, and was obliged to be pinioned in a strait-waistcoat. After this he got quieter, not so much from the restraint as the weakness and loss of blood consequent on his paroxysm. He would listen with marked attention to the chaplain, who visited him daily; and when the good man was gone would mumble out incoherent words of repentance and amendment; but could never fix his mind upon their meaning for two seconds at a time. Then he would give it up in despair, and would shout and sing again more boisterously than ever. At length it became evident, even to Charlie's enfeebled perceptions, that he was sinking fast; and as the sand of life ebbed more and more rapidly, the dying man became more and more composed and tranquil, till he promised to make as peaceful an ending as ever did glorified saint in Popish calendar. The eye lost its unnatural glitter,

the pain ceased entirely, and the pulse became quiet and regular, but oh, so weak for that active muscular frame! The youngest Tyro would not have been deceived by the change; it was obvious that his very hours were numbered, yet now, for the first time, he seemed to recognise place and people—called Charlie by his name, and asked Mr. Kettering after 'the reg'ment,' and whether the old major was shot dead when he forced the river so smartly, and the colour-serjeant (he never could abide that colour-serjeant) lost his life in the very middle of the stream; then he remembered how Charlie had led the assault, and from that time he seemed to confide in him, and whispered to him his plans, and his little spites against his comrades, and his longing for his old life, for he made no doubt of getting well. And so he slept for a few hours (the doctor came in and looked at him asleep, and shook his head), and woke about noon, and asked for something to drink; but his lips were quite black, and Charlie saw that he was somehow changed even before the man told him he was conscious of it himself.

'It's all up, Mr. Kettering,' said he, in a husky whisper,—'it's all up with me this turn. What's the time o' day now? Twelve o'clock? I shall be a dead man at sundown,' and then he told Charlie how he had received a warning, and he knew there was no hope '*here* nor yet *yonder*,' he said with a ghastly smile; for he had dreamt that he was stand-

ing sentry on a rampart over against the ocean, and the sun was setting in a golden haze, and the waters gleamed like molten gold; and he laid his firelock down, and rested and gazed with delight upon the scene; but a girl rose from the waves, far off between him and the sunset, and wrung the water from her long black hair, and pressed it with both hands to her throat, and seemed to stanch a ghastly wound that gaped at him even at that distance, and ever the blood flowed and flowed, and the sea became crimson, and the sun went down in blood-red streaks, and the sky darkened to the colour of blood, and everywhere there was blood, blood, nothing but blood; and the girl screamed to him in agony, saying, 'Pray! pray!' and he knew that if he could speak a prayer before the sun went down he might be saved, and he strove and gasped, but he was choked; and still the sun dipped and dipped, and a fiery rim only was left above the sea, and still he could not speak; and it went down too, and the girl tossed up her arms with a shriek, and all was dark; and then with a convulsive effort he cried aloud, and his mouth was full of blood—and so he woke. 'And I shall never stand sentry nor carry a firelock again,' he said; and from that time he spoke no more, but folded his hands and lay quiet as if asleep. The afternoon shadows lengthened on the hospital-wall—the evening drew near—at half-past six the dying man muttered a request for drink—at seven the sun went down, and he

was dead!—peacefully, quietly he parted, like a child going to its rest. Charlie never knew it was all over till the Doctor came; and they took him away and buried him, and there was a vacant place by Charlie's bed-side; and so Her Majesty lost a soldier, and a recruit was enlisted and sent to the depôt at home, and his place in the ranks was filled, and he was forgotten just as peers, poets, conquerors, sovereigns, and sages, are forgotten—only a little sooner, for the Grim Reaper makes no distinction, and the monarch oak of the forest perishes as surely as the weed by the wayside.

* * * *

Week after week, Charlie lay in that weary bed. One by one patients became convalescents, and convalescents went back to their duty, and still he was not allowed to move. A fresh action was fought, and more wounded were brought in, and yet Charlie was unfit for duty, in fact, was unable to rise. The Doctor was hopeful and good-humoured, as doctors generally are, not being invalids themselves, and told him 'he was going on most satisfactorily, and all that was wanted was a little time, and patience and quiet;' but at length even he hinted at sick-leave, and talked of a return to England, and the necessity of care and avoidance of exposure to weather, even after the wounds were healed, and Charlie's dearest hopes of rejoining his regiment, and tasting once more the excitement of warfare, were dashed to the ground.

The kind doctor had written to his patient's friends in England, and assured them of his safety,—on the rejoicings thereby created at Newton-Hollows we need not now enlarge,—so that all anxiety on that score had passed away, and there was nothing to do now but to get well, and embark for home. What a tedious process that same getting well was. Charlie began to pine, and grow dispirited and nervous. He had no friends, no one to speak to but the doctor; and the gallant boy, who would have faced a whole tribe of Kaffirs, single-handed, and never moved an eye-lash, was now so completely weakened and broken down, that he would lie and weep for hours, like a girl, he knew not why. At last he began to give way to despondency altogether. One day in particular, when the ward was again emptied of its recovered inmates, and the boy was left quite alone, in that long dull room, he lost heart entirely. 'I shall never get well now,' he said aloud, in his despair; 'I shall never see the bright blue sky again, nor the regiment, nor Blanche, nor Mrs. Delaval, nor any of them—sinking, sinking day by day, and scarcely twenty. 'Tis a hard lot to die like a dog, in such a hole as this. Ah! Frank always talked of death as the ever-present certainty, and the next world will be a happier one than this, I do believe, though this has been a happy one to me. I used to think I shouldn't mind dying, the least—no more I should, in the free open air, leading a squadron,

with the men hurraing behind me; or falling neck and crop into a grass-field with 'Hap-Hazard,' alongside the leading hounds. (Charlie was barely twenty, and to him the hunting-field was just such an arena of glory as was the tilt-yard to a knight of the olden time). No, I could die like a man at home, but to rot away here in a hospital, thousands of miles from merry England, without a friend near me, it's hard to bear it pluckily, as it ought to be borne. Frank! Frank! I want some of your dogged resolution now. If I could see your dear old face once more, and shake you by the hand, I should be a different fellow. Ah! it's too late now, I shall never see you again, and you will hardly know what became of me. But you won't forget me, old boy, will you?' and poor Charlie gave way once more, and turned his wet cheek down upon his pillow, as he heard the doctor's step along the passage; for he was ashamed of his weakness, though he knew it was but the effect of his wounds. Hark! there is some one with him: the doctor is bringing a visitor to see him. He knows that firm heavy tread. Is it one of his brother officers?—how kind of them. No, that is no dragoon's step: it is familiar, too, and yet he cannot remember where he has heard it. Is he dreaming?—Over the doctor's shoulder peers a well-known face, embrowned with travel, but with the old kind, frank expression beaming through those manly features. In another instant Charlie is clasp-

ing Frank Hardingstone's strong hand in his own two emaciated ones, and after an abortive 'How are ye, old fellow?' and a vain effort to laugh off his emotion, is sobbing once more like a woman or a child.

'So you came out all the way from England on purpose to look after me,' said he, when the first burst of feeling had subsided: 'how like you, old Frank —how kind of you; and what did they say about me at home? and wasn't Blanche sorry for me, when she thought I was killed? and did Uncle Baldwin and—and Mrs. Delaval read the despatch? and where are they all now? You know I 'm to have sick-leave, and we 'll go back together. When does the doctor think I shall be able to sail? Frank, he 's a shocking muff; I 've been in this bed for thirteen weeks, but I shall get up to-day, of course he 'll let me get up to-day;' and so Charlie ran on, and Frank was soon forcibly withdrawn from the patient, whose over-excitement was likely to be as prejudicial as his late despondency; but the maligned doctor whispered to him, as he went out, 'Your arrival, sir, has done more for my patient than the whole pharmacopeia: he 'll be well now in a fortnight.'

The doctor was right. From that day Charlie began to mend. Many a long hour Frank sat by his bedside, and talked to him of home, and his prospects, and of his cousin (honest Frank), and settled over and over again their plans of departure, to which Charlie was never tired of listening; and after every

one of these visits the boy's appetite was better and his sleep sounder, and in a few days he got out of bed, and then he was moved into the hospital-serjeant's room, who readily vacated his apartment for the young officer; and then he got out on Frank's arm, into the summer air, for which he had so pined —pleasant it was, but yet not *so* pleasant as he had thought it would be, when he lay in that dull ward; and then his voracity became something ridiculous, and at the end of about three weeks Frank helped him up the companion-way of the *Phlegethon,* 200-horse power, homeward-bound; and although wasted to a skeleton, his large eyes looked bright and clear, and now that he was really on his way to England he was well.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Widow.

FAMILY ARRANGEMENTS—MOTHER AND SON—SEPARATE INTERESTS—A WIDOW'S DAY-DREAMS—FEMALE CONFIDENCES—THE RULE OF CONTRARY.

'MY dear Mount, I think, after all, I shall spend the winter at Bubbleton,' said Lady Mount Helicon to her hopeful son, as they sat one sunny afternoon in her well-furnished drawing-room. London was emptying fast, a few of the lingerers still contrived to keep up a semblance of gaiety, and those who stayed on, like Lady Mount Helicon, because they had no country-houses to go to, voted it *so* much pleasanter now the crush and hurry of the season was over. But even these could not conceal from themselves that they were but 'the last roses of summer,' that 'all the world' was rushing out of town, and they had no business here any longer. The water-carts were getting very slack and the dust unbearable; the ride and the ring were fitting haunts for a hermit, and the Serpentine was gloomy as the Styx. Dinadam was inhaling appetite in his deer-forest—Long-Acre was tempting Providence in his yacht—Mrs. Blacklamb was breaking hearts at Cowes

—ministers had celebrated their many defeats during the session by their annual fish-dinner at Greenwich —and grouse were advertised at five shillings a brace in Leadenhall Market. Yes, the season was over, and Mount would not have been here instead of in Perthshire, had it not been for the absolute necessity of his writing his autograph in person for the ulterior disappointment of a Hebrew, and his own immediate benefit. He was an excellent son when he had nothing better to do, and now sat for hours with his mother and talked over his own plans and hers with the most perfect open-heartedness.'

'Bubbleton,' said he, 'mother, and why Bubbleton?'

'Can't you see, Mount?' replied her ladyship, 'Bubbleton is within visiting distance of Newton-Hollows.'

'What then?' rejoined her son, 'I thought you had made up your mind to drop them when you found they were of no use.'

'So I should, my dear,' confessed the diplomatic lady, 'if things had turned out as I expected; but don't you see that the game is not yet half played out. That unfortunate boy who went off to the Cape has been severely wounded; you know, they put on mourning for him thinking he was dead, and it is quite on the cards that he may not recover; he never looked strong; then our little friend is as great an heiress as ever; and I am sure, with *your*

eloquence, you could easily persuade her that it was jealously, or pique, or something equally flattering, that made you so remiss for a time, and it would be all *on* again. Besides, I have been making a good many inquiries lately in a round-about way, and I find that, even if the 'beau cousin' should return safe and sound, there will be a large sum of ready money to which the girl will be entitled when she comes of age. You want money, Mount, I fancy?'

'Not a doubt of it, my dear mother,' replied he; 'this has been my worst year for a long time, and you know I never holloa before I'm hurt. Goodwood *ought* to have pulled me through, if 'Sennacherib' hadn't failed at the last stride. I am afraid to say, and I can believe you had rather not hear, what that odd six inches cost me. No, mother, I can't go on much longer; I don't see my way a bit. If a general election comes, I shall have to bolt.'

'Listen to me, Mount,' said her ladyship. 'I have a plan that may save us all yet. I shall take a house at Bubbleton for the winter, and wherever I have a roof over my head, you know I am too happy to give you a home. You can send down two or three horses, and hunt quietly in the neighbourhood, instead of going off to Melton with eight or ten, and losing a fortune at whist; and of all places I know, Bubbleton is the most likely for something to *turn up*—then *if* we should arrange matters with Miss Kettering, everything will go smoothly; but there is

one thing I must beg of you, my dear Mount, and that is to give up the turf. It is all I ask,' said her ladyship, with tears in her eyes—'all I ask in return for my devotion to your interests is to sell those horrid race-horses, and give the thing up altogether.

Mount made a wry face—'Sennacherib,' notwithstanding his defeat, which, as usual, was from no lack of speed or stamina, but entirely in consequence of *the way the race was run*, 'Sennacherib,' was the very darling of his heart; and he had, besides, amongst his yearlings, *such* a filly, that promised, as far as babies of that age can promise, to have the speed of the wind. Must these treasures go to Tattersall's? Must the hopes of Olympic triumphs and future mines of wealth be all knocked down to the highest bidder, as the stud of a nobleman declining racing? It was a bitter pill; but he knew his mother was a strong-minded woman—he knew that if she insisted on the sacrifice being made a part of the bargain, nothing would induce her to fulfil her share unless he fulfilled his. He recollected how, in his father's time, crabbed as that respectable nobleman undoubtedly was, my Lady always got her own way in the long run, and he determined to make a virtue of necessity and give in, consoling himself with the reflection, that, when all was arranged, he could easily buy some more horses with his wife's money. So he promised with a good grace, and his mother

kissed him, and called him 'her own dear boy,' and the pair separated—my Lord to get upon 'Trictrac,' and ride down to Richmond, whither there is no occasion for us to follow him—my Lady to write sundry little notes to her friends, to consult with her agent about letting her house in London—and then, with a good book upon her knee, to indulge in dreamy, castle-building schemes, for upholding the integrity of the house of Mount Helicon, not unmixed with rosier visions as regarded her own prospects for the future.

This pair, whatever might be their failings as regarded the rest of the world, seemed at all events blamelessly to fulfil their duties each towards the other. Yet behind this apparent sincerity and affection each was playing a separate game totally irrespective of aught but self; each was actuated solely by motives of interest; each had a separate path to pursue, a separate object to attain. Mount Helicon came readily into his mother's views for the best of all reasons. Everything that could save the disbursement of a shilllng, was now of paramount importance to him. After a problematic trip to Norway in Long-Acre's yacht, he would literally not have a roof to cover him. It was all very well to make a great merit of giving up Melton, and to dwell on the sacrifice he made on his mother's account, in foregoing the delights of that very charming place, but Mount had now neither hunters nor the means of

getting them, and a man at Melton without money or horses is like a fish out of water, or a teetotaller at an Irish wake. Everything had failed with him lately. Successful as were his literary schemes, their profits were but a drop in the ocean compared with his necessities. Goodwood had nearly finished him, and he hardly dared think of Doncaster, so unfortunate were his investments on the coming St. Leger. He could see only one way out of his difficulties—to sell himself and his title to some wealthy young lady, and he rather fancied giving Blanche the opportunity of becoming a purchaser; that which he would have considered a mere pittance some six months ago, he now looked upon as a very fair competence, and the chance of young Kettering's death, with the reversion of that large property, was a contingency by no means to be despised, so he submitted with as good a grace as he could, to selling his race-horses, and spending the winter at Bubbleton with his mother, inwardly resolving that when he had secured his object he would break out again into fresh extravagancies, and shine with redoubled splendour.

Lady Mount Helicon, too, had her own ends to further in her affectionate and hospitable invitation to her son. She had found out that his agreeable qualities, his large acquaintance, and his brilliant reputation always succeeded in filling her house with those whom she was pleased to term 'the best men,' fastidious individuals who never condescended

to dine with her when Mount and she kept separate establishments. Now my Lady calculated that what with her title, her cook, and her celebrated son, she would create a prodigious sensation at Bubbleton, where neither rank, talent, nor faultless cutlets are as common as in London; and that with these attractions in her house, she would have an opportunity of seeing all the male eligibles whom that salubrious locality might bring together. And she could thus judge of them at her leisure, and pick and choose at her caprice. That was the end in view. The idea of entering once more into the holy bonds of matrimony had long been present to her ladyship's mind; and when she consulted her looking-glass, and saw reflected her large comely form, her still healthy complexion, and her well-arranged hair, by courtesy called auburn, but sufficiently red to lose little of its youthful appearance from an occasional silver line, she grudged more and more that all these charms should be wasted on a widow's lonely lot, and resolved, that when the time came, and the *man*, it would be no fault of hers if she did not stand again at the altar in the coloured robes of a bride, who adds the advantage of experience to the ripe maturity of autumnal beauty. Bubbleton, then, was the very place from which to select the fortunate man. Its frequenters were many of them steady-going respectable gentlemen of middle-age, and, like all unmarried middle-aged men,

unless completely ruined, sufficiently well-to-do in the world. Such are by no means ineligible matches for a widow: and then, should none of these be found willing to aspire to such happiness, might not General Bounce surrender at discretion, if properly invested? more particularly should the other matrimonial scheme progress favourably, and the relationship thus created afford opportunities for surprises, *coups-de-main*, or the tardier but no less fatal advances of a regular blockade. He certainly had paid her attention in London; he was a stout, soldier-like man for his years; above all, he had a charming place at Newton Hollows, and a good fortune of his own. Yes, *faute de mieux*, the General would do very well; and then the two families might live together, and if Blanche *did* succeed to everything, what a piece of luck it would be for them all! And her ladyship, with all her knowledge of the world, actually deluded herself into the idea that the two establishments could keep the peace for an hour together in the same house, or that Mount, after he had got all he could, and had no further use for his mother, would hear of such an arrangement for one single moment. So Lady Mount Helicon rose and smoothed her hair in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and looked at a miniature of herself, done before she married, and lying on the drawing-room table; and persuaded herself she was wonderfully little altered since then,

and returned in haste to her good book and her seat with her back to the light, you may be sure, as a knock at the door announced an arrival, and her well-powdered figure-footman ushered in Lady Phœbe Featherhead.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'Stop Her.'

THE VOYAGE HOME—'WHOM TO MARRY'—DISINTERESTED ADVICE—THE LOOKER ON SEES MOST OF THE GAME—A FOG IN THE CHANNEL—FRANK'S STRIKING ARGUMENTS—LADIES FIRST—THE REMNANT ON THE WRECK—HOPE ON THE HORIZON—HAIRBLOWER'S OFFER.

IN these days of steam and perpetual locomotion, everybody has been a voyage of some sort over the seas; and one of these uncomfortable expeditions is so like another, that it is needless to describe the transit of Frank Hardingstone and Cousin Charlie from the Cape home. There were but few passengers on board the *Phlegethon,* and those were as much bored with the length and monotony of their voyage as passengers usually are; they ate, drank, smoked, walked the deck, pestered the professionals with perpetual questions as to when they should make the Needles, and otherwise comported themselves so as to lengthen as much as possible the apparent duration of their imprisonment. Charlie was as idle and impatient as the rest. Frank alone seemed an exception to the general rule; when not reading hard in his cabin, he was sure to be found studying steam

in the engine-room, 'shooting the sun' with the captain, or learning navigation with the mate. 'There's a good man spoilt in making that chap a gentleman,' was the constant remark of these worthies, who contracted an immense love and admiration for Frank. Yet of late he had maintained a grim reserve very foreign to his usual open demeanour, and more especially in the society of 'Cousin Charlie.' He did not shun him, nor did that careless and good-humoured young gentleman perceive any difference in his friend's manner; but Frank could not conceal from himself that he was not thoroughly at ease with the boy for whom he had endured so much. He felt that he had given up his dearest hopes for his young *protégé*; that he had sacrificed to him the inestimable treasure of Blanche Kettering's love; he had on one or two occasions even done such violence to his feelings as to touch upon the subject of their approaching marriage in his conversations with her cousin, and had been surprised and disgusted at the coldness with which so engrossing a topic was received by the young gentleman most concerned. Frank could have borne it better, he thought, had Charlie been worthy of the blessings in store for him—had he appreciated the unspeakable bliss which others would have given all on earth to enjoy; but to yield her to one who scarce seemed willing to stretch out his hand to receive her—to resign all that made life valuable to another, and to

find that other appreciated the object as little as the sacrifice,—this was indeed a hard task; but Frank thought it his duty so to act, and resolved, with his usual determination and forgetfulness of self, that he would lose no opportunity of forcing upon Charlie the absolute necessity of marrying the only woman he had himself ever loved. Thus the voyage drew to a close. Contrary winds were baffled by the power of steam; the good ship stemmed the mountain waves of the Bay of Biscay, and at length the coast of England was hailed; and though labouring in a heavy gale of wind and a cross-pitching sea, they were steaming steadily up the Channel, and congratulating themselves that to-morrow they would once more set foot on English ground. Frank and Charlie were on deck, enjoying the broken gleams of an afternoon's sun, that shone fitfully through the mists and storm-rack driving fast overhead; and their conversation naturally enough turned upon their own plans and intentions when they should get ashore. Charlie was full of his horses and his anticipations of sport in game-preserve and hunting-field, with sundry speculations as to the state of 'Hap-Hazard's' legs, much damaged by the never-to-be-forgotten steeple-chase; and it was with difficulty Frank could command his attention whilst he made a final effort to impress upon him the absolute necessity of his making up his mind and marrying his pretty cousin forthwith.

'It's not fair upon any one,' said Frank, holding manfully on to the mizen-topmast stay, 'it's not doing as you'd be done by, to keep a thing of this sort off-and-on; it's not fair upon your family; it's not fair upon your uncle; and, above all, it's not fair upon Miss Kettering herself. I conceive that you are bound, as a gentleman, to make all necessary arrangements, so that the business may be concluded within a month or two of your arrival at Newton Hollows.'

Charlie looked rather aghast. 'Well but,' said he, 'I should have to leave the regiment. You wouldn't have me bring Blanche out to Kaffirland—poor little Blanche, she'd be frightened to death, and I know I should have to sell out—Frank, I couldn't bear to leave the regiment. I like soldiering better than anything.'

'We can't help that,' rejoined his friend. 'You've a duty to perform in life, and you must go through with it. You're not to live for yourself alone; and look how many people are interested in this question. In the first place, there's your cousin. In consequence of this will they've found, you have been the innocent cause of robbing her of a princely inheritance; this is the only method by which you can replace her in the former advantageous position. It was evidently intended all through by your uncle and your poor aunt that this marriage should take place, and their wishes ought to be your law. Then

the General has set his heart upon it, I *know*, and you are both under great obligations to that kind old man. But all these considerations are as nothing compared with the feelings of Blanche herself. Charlie, would you begin by supplanting her in her birthright, and finish by breaking her heart?'

Charlie looked wofully disconcerted. This was altogether a new light, and he stammered out: 'Of course I should like to do what 's right, but I don't want to give up the army;—and—and I 'm very fond of Blanche, you know, and all that, but I don't think I quite like her well enough to marry her.'

'Not like her!' exclaimed Hardingstone, to whom this latter reason was totally incomprehensible, 'not like such a girl as that—the loveliest, the sweetest, the most angelic, the most lady-like creature on the face of the earth—I 've never seen anything the least to be compared to her in *my* experience; and you talk of not liking her!'

'Hang it, Frank,' interposed the lad, 'I wish you 'd marry her yourself. I 'll go shares with her in fortune; there 's more than enough for us both, and you 're much fitter to be a respectable man than I am.'

The shaft went deep into his heart, but the strong man never winced or failed for a moment. 'What right have you,' he broke in almost fiercely, 'what right have you to talk of giving her money, and laying her under obligations? Like Falstaff,' he

added, relapsing into his usual manner, 'you owe her yourself and the money too. For heaven's sake, Charlie, don't tamper with the happiness of a lifetime—honour, duty, expediency, all point one way—do not, for a mere whim, neglect that which, left undone, you will repent ever afterwards. Promise me, *now* promise me, Charlie, that you will marry your cousin before you again leave Newton-Hollows.'

Charlie bit his lip, stroked his moustaches, looked first one way and then another; and finally, blushing crimson over his wasted face, exclaimed: 'Never, Frank,—if you must know it, you had better know it now—never, I tell you, and for the best of all reasons; of course it goes no farther, but the fact is, I—I—like somebody else much better.'

'And do you think you are the only person that has to sacrifice inclination, nay, happiness, existence itself, to duty? Do you think you are to be exempt from the common lot of man—to receive everything and give up nothing? Do you owe no duty to your cousin? Are you not all-in-all to her? And are you to destroy all the hopes of her lifetime, to break her young heart, as you have destroyed her prospects, for your own selfish gratification. Trust me, Charlie, she loves you, and whether you care for her or not. unless your word is irrevocably pledged to another, it is your duty to marry her, and marry her you must!'

'You're wrong, Frank,' said Charlie, with a roguish smile; 'you're wrong—you're a sharp fellow generally, but you're out of your reckoning here. Blanche has exactly the same regard for me that a sister has for a brother—but love, as you and I understand the word, bless you, she hasn't a notion of it, as far as I am concerned; but I'll tell you whom I think she *does* love, Frank—ah! you may wince and turn pale, but you ought to know, and I'll tell you. Frank, do you remember the Guyville Ball? why! you're not pale now—I should never have mentioned it if you hadn't driven me into a corner, but now out it shall come. Do you remember when you came up and turned away without asking her to dance, while we were waltzing together? Well, when Blanche looked up her eyes were full of tears, and she said to me, 'What's the matter with Mr. Hardingstone? I'm afraid he's offended with us.' And I said, 'Blanche, you little flirt, he thinks you've jilted him.' And she blushed over her face, and neck, and shoulders, aye, redder than you are now, old boy, and she followed you with such a loving, piteous look—and I saw it all in a moment. Yes, Frank, Blanche is over head and ears in love with you, and I'm glad of it, for there's no other man in the world that's worthy of her, and *you* shall marry her, Frank, and *I* won't, and I'll get drunk at the wedding—but let's go below now. These cold evenings make me cough, and, I suppose, the steward

will manage some supper for us, though it *is* blowing so hard,' with which gastronomic aspiration, hungry Charlie disappeared down the hatchway, and left an altered man behind him, to pace the deck in a confused state of tumultuous, almost delirious, happiness.

Frank was anything but a vain man; he had always considered himself as possessing no attractions for the other sex, and that such a girl as Blanche Kettering should look upon him favourably was a happiness he had scarcely allowed himself to picture in his dreams, but now that it was suggested by another, now that it appeared to impartial eyes neither an impossibility nor an absurdity, a thousand trifling circumstances rose in his recollection, a thousand little lights and shades of looks, and tones, and expressions, came back to him distinct and vivid, with a meaning and a colouring they had never possessed before, and he could hardly restrain the happiness that gushed up in his bosom and sparkled in his eye, as, after a few minutes of delicious solitude on deck, he joined the party at supper in the cabin, and one and all remarked that now the voyage was nearly over, the grave Mr. Hardingstone appeared to be quite a different man. To their questions as to the weather, he stated, that it was 'a beautiful night,' which caused the captain to look at him as at an undoubted lunatic, inasmuch as the sea was getting up rapidly, and a thick mist was driving over the

face of the waters. With the passengers he joked, and laughed, and played *vingt-et-un*, and made himself so universally popular and agreeable, that those very persons, who had all along voted him an odd, reserved, uncomfortable sort of fellow, now almost regretted that they should so soon be parted from such a fund of good-humour and merriment, as they discovered, all too late, in their fellow-passenger.

The night grew blacker, as the mist increased, with the somewhat moderating gale, and a long, heaving swell came rolling up from the Atlantic, each succeeding sea appearing to rear its gigantic volume higher, further, fiercer, than its predecessor, and still the good ship steamed on through the darkness. A light at her foretop, and an indistinct glimmer at the binnacle, only made the surrounding obscurity appear more palpable, and through the dense fog, which seemed to pervade the very deck, and to hang around the spars and tackle, it was difficult to distinguish the two phantom figures at the wheel, and the look-out man in the bows. The captain ever and anon dived to his cabin to consult his chart, and, re-appearing on the wet, slippery deck, cast an anxious eye at the ship's compass, and the course she was lying—then glanced to windward, where some huge wave flung its crest of foam into the light, and sporting with that powerful steamer as with a plaything, dashed its beating spray, in wantonness of strength, high over the protecting bul-

warks, till the very yards dripped and streamed with brine. A few gruff words, unintelligible to the landsmen, were addressed to the struggling steersmen, and again the captain glanced anxiously at the compass, and knit his brows and seemed ill-at-ease. Between the decks, confiding passengers snored in their berths, and dreamt of home. Little thought they of darkness, and fog, and driving seas. They had paid their passage-money, and they were to be delivered safe at their destination—was it not in the bond? They were, besides, in the Channel, and the ladies on board derived unspeakable relief and consolation from the knowledge that they were once more in soundings—and they, too, slept the sleep of innocence and security. So midnight passed, and still the good ship held steadily on.

But the captain grew more restless and disturbed, and he ordered the steam to be slackened, and a sailor to be slung over the side, and to heave the lead, and these were wise and seamanlike precautions, but they were a few minutes too late. As the words left his mouth, a shock that made that huge fabric shake again, brought him to the deck. True to his seaman nature, he shouted to 'back the engines,' even as he fell, but she was aground, and it was too late. Ere he recovered his legs he knew too well what had happened. Sea after sea came pouring over the deck, one of the men at the wheel was washed overboard, the other barely saved as he clung

for dear life to the helm; everything that was not secured went at once by the board, and the dashing waves plunging heavily into the engine-room, put out the fires, and reduced that triumph of man's ingenuity to a mere helpless log upon the waters. The seamen came tumbling up to the forecastle, every man as he had slept, half dressed, and even now scarce awake; yet such is the force of habit, that confusion prevailed more than alarm, and here and there even a jest arose to lips which in a few hours might probably be silenced for ever. But if not sole mistress on deck, Fear could boast of undivided dominion below. Shrieks, and sobs, and wailing prayers burst from the affrighted passengers, as they rushed tumultuously from their respective berths into the saloon, and asked wildly what had happened, and inquired with white lips if there was any danger; one said, 'Is there any hope?' and the panic increased as it spread, and wives clung upon their husbands' breasts, and pressed their children to their sides, and screamed in an unbearable agony of fear,—and one, a strong stout man, shouted for help as though terror had turned his brain, and raved of his wife and his little ones at home—that home on firm dry land, that he had never known how to prize before—then a white-haired minister, one of honest John Wesley's followers, proposed in a calm steady voice, that each and all should kneel down and pray; but the af-

frighted mass, now wavering and struggling to the hatchway, paid no attention to the good man's suggestion; for each strove to reach the deck as though it were a haven of safety, each instinctively shrank from the idea of perishing in that dark dreadful cabin, and the selfishness of man came out and developed itself even in that maddened crowd as they pushed each other aside, and struggled who should be first to reach the door.

'Charlie! where are you?' exclaimed Frank Hardingstone's unshaken voice, as he emerged already dressed from his cabin, into the seething confusion of the saloon.

'Here!' said Charlie, struggling to free himself from the embraces of a stout old Frenchwoman, who, wild with terror, was choking the lad as she clung round his neck and implored him to be her preserver. 'Here! Frank, we're aground, I think; I want to get on deck and make myself useful, if this old woman would let me go!'

Charlie freed himself from the venerable dame's embrace, but she clung hard to his garments, and he was forced to slip out of the dressing-gown which he had put on at the first moment of alarm, and leaving it in her grasp, to make his escape clad only in his shirt and trowsers. When he reached the deck he found Frank already there, having put himself under the captain's orders, and now lending his assistance to restore discipline as far as possible, and to clear

the wreck. The huge ship heaved and shivered in her throes, as wave after wave washed her farther on to the shoal; the fog, too, added to the confusion of the scene, and as it became doubtful whether her timbers could stand against the violence of these successive shocks, even the sturdy seamen began to hint at her going to pieces,—and the cry, though none knew whence it first arose, thrilled from stem to stern, 'The boats! the boats! Launch the boats!'

'By Him that made me! I'll strike the first man dead that stirs without orders,' cried the captain, heaving a broad axe above his head, his voice rising through the confusion of the crew and the dash of the leaping waves.

'Can the boats live in such a sea?' whispered Frank, as he stood by the captain's side, prepared to lend him any assistance he might require.

'Undoubtedly, sir!' was the reply; 'it's our only chance. We'll get the women and children in first. Mr. Hardingstone, you're a *man!* take charge of the larboard boat—let no man into it without orders—we may save them all yet!' and the captain sprang to the starboard boat, laid hold of the 'davits,' and sang out, 'Lower away, men, easy!' whilst Frank, in a hurried whisper, gave his orders to Charlie, who was as cool as a cucumber throughout.

'Charlie, keep the hatchway with the steward, he's a bold fellow—don't let a single man up till

the women and children are all on deck. If any fellow runs rusty, *knock him down!*'

By this time order was to a certain degree restored —the passengers were indeed in a frightful state below, when they found their egress barred, as they thought so arbitrarily, from all hopes of safety; but on deck every man had his own duty to perform, and the magic power of discipline, assisted by the dawn, which was now struggling into light, bid fair to give them every chance of safety that knowledge and experience could suggest. But one man was mutinous. A strong, black-bearded fellow, with a dogged, lowering countenance, who had been most assiduous in helping Hardingstone to lower away the larboard boat, no sooner found it launched than he made a rush for the side, to place himself, as he hoped, in safety, regardless of the helpless and the weak.

'Stand back!' said Frank, in a voice of thunder; 'wait for your turn.'

'Turn be ——,' growled the man; 'who made *you* skipper? D'ye think I'd lose my life for a land lubber like you?'

'I warn you!' said Frank, clenching his fist, and looking dangerous. The man advanced, as though to push him aside. Frank drew himself together, and struck out. He knocked him clean off his legs, on to the deck, where he lay stunned and bleeding.

'Serve him right,' cried Charlie, from the hatch-

way; an observation which was echoed by the crew; and Frank had no further difficulty in preserving discipline at the station of which he had taken the command. One by one, pale, trembling women, and bewildered little children, pattering on the deck with bare feet, and enveloped in shawls, petticoats, anything that had been first caught up in the hurry of the moment, were handed through the hatchway, and lowered carefully over the side into the heaving boats. There they clung together, shivering and drenched with spray, some of the women with scarce any other covering than their white night-dresses, their long, wet hair hanging about their shoulders; but even in that extremity thinking only of their children, and regardless of their own sufferings and danger. Poor things! how scared they were by the first minute-gun that boomed from the wreck; for the Captain, assisted by Frank Hardingstone's coolness, and now equal to any emergency, had not neglected the precaution of making every possible signal of distress. Then the male passengers were drafted singly, and handed over the side by the dauntless seamen. Some behaved gallantly enough, and offered to stand by the ship and the captain to the last; some trembled and cowered, submissively obeying every order given them, and apparently rendered totally helpless by fear. One sturdy little boy, of some ten or eleven years, clung manfully to a toy, the property of his infant sister; and when

compelled to lay hold of the guiding-rope with both hands, seized the bauble between his teeth, and so reached his mother in the boat. The rough sailors gave him a cheer.

At length the passengers were disposed of; a few cloaks and pea-jackets were thrown in to cover the women; the ship's compass was placed in one of the boats; a crew of seamen were told off, and seized the oars; the mate took the command; strict injunctions were given for the boats to keep together; and they shoved off into that heaving sea. It was now broad daylight, and the rain falling heavily.

'Thank God, sir,' said the captain, with a sigh of relief, 'we've disposed of the passengers. The wind's falling now, with this wet, and they'll make the land in three or four hours. I trust in Providence every hair of their heads will be saved; and we've nothing to think of but ourselves.'

'There's a dozen of us left,' said Frank, looking round on the dripping group, who were clinging to the different parts of the wreck, consisting of one or two subordinate officers, the boatswain, and a few old, weather-beaten seamen; 'that boat will hold us all, if she will swim; but she's rather a cockle-shell for such a sea as this,' he observed, pointing to a small, shallow skiff that hung at the stern, and which had not yet been lowered.

'It's our best chance,' said the captain, looking very grave, as another rolling sea made the wreck

heave, and quiver, and strain, as if she must go to pieces; 'but she'll never hold us all. I'll stand by the ship to the last; and you two gentlemen, to whose coolness, under Providence, the passengers owe their lives, will bear witness I did my duty. God bless you! Lower away, men; cheerily, oh!' So the boat was lowered; and as she touched the water, she filled and sank, and appeared again, bottom uppermost, some fifty yards away: and so the last chance of escape was cut off. The little party looked at each other in blank dismay; even Frank's bold heart tightened itself for an instant in the pressure of despair. Only the gruff boatswain found words to say, 'That bit plug, that didn't ought to have been neglected, 's worth exactly twelve men's lives. This here's a stopper over all, blessed if it ain't.' There was nothing to be done now, but to wait manfully for death. Poor Charlie was already half-dead with cold; but Frank took off his own pea-jacket, and wrapped it round the lad, and lashed him to the foremast; for though the weather had moderated considerably, a sea came every now and then driving over the deck, and carrying everything before it. The wreck was by this time filling fast, and sinking gradually: already she had settled by the stern, and only her bows and a part of the forecastle remained above water. On this the sufferers were congregated, and few words did they interchange, for consolation or hope there was none in

this world. Their powder was exhausted—true, there was plenty below, in the powder-magazine, but that was long ago swamped, so that their very cries for help must be silenced—that iron voice, their sole chance of rescue, must be dumb. The fog, too, began to clear away, and a bright gleam of sunshine ever and anon shone out upon the yellow foam-crested waves, and glistened on the white wings of the dipping sea-gulls. By degrees the blue sky peered over-head, and the gap widened and widened, and the mists rising in wreaths from the waters, now heaving and subsiding into rest, floated lazily away, and the discoloured sea became bright and blue, and the sun burst forth into a glorious autumn day, and the warmth of his rays almost comforted those poor wet wretches, clinging hopelessly to the wreck. It seemed hard to die on such a day, but exhaustion was beginning to tell upon some of the sufferers, and the lassitude of despair was creeping over them with its drowsy influence, and the reason of more than one began to give way. So they waited and spoke not, and some strove to pray, and some shut their eyes, as if in sleep; and noon came, and the day was bright and hot, and the sea-birds screamed and soared, and everything was full of joy and life, and only that little circle of twelve were doomed to die. Frank and Charlie were together, and every now and then each pressed the other's hand, but neither spoke. The captain, who was nearest them,

seemed stupified with despair, and he, too, spoke not. They were a silent company. The day crept on: every minute was precious, yet the minutes dragged on like lead. Once the captain stirred, and Frank, glancing eagerly at his face, was aware of a strange light upon it and a gleam in his fixed eye that was almost unearthly. Was it insanity? Could it be hope? Frank's breath stopped, as he followed the direction of the captain's gaze, but he could see nothing, save the glancing waters and the hopeless sky-line. But still the captain stared, and the old boatswain, too, was looking eagerly in the same direction, and another seaman seemed to wake from his stupor, and Frank strained his eyes, and at last he was aware of a black speck on the horizon, and, ere he could trust his sight, the stout old captain burst into tears, and a feeble cheer rose from the exhausted seamen, a cheer that thrilled through Frank's very marrow, for he knew that they were saved.

'What is it,' said Charlie, faintly, opening his heavy eyes.'

'It's a boat,' was the reply,—'a boat; the bitterness of death is past, thank God! thank God!'

Then came the painful suspense, the agony of hope and fear; it might after all be but a spar, or a black fish, or anything save what they wished. No—it was a boat, a real boat; but her crew might not see them, they might be fishing, they might never think

of the wreck; then the poor exhausted fellows strained their throats in a feeble hail, or rather a hoarse desperate shriek. But the boat is bearing down upon them—she nears them. 'Wreck a-hoy! hilli-ho!' Never was music like to this on mortal ear. Her sharp nose comes dancing and dipping over the waves, the glance of her oars flashes in the sun; now they can distinguish the forms of the rowers—now the cheery voices of their countrymen gladden their very heart's core—and now she is alongside; and despair is over—suspense and misery are forgotten—and the past is like a dream.

The steamer had struck far nearer the shore than her reckoning had given the captain reason to suppose, and her guns had at length been heard by some fishermen on the beach at St. Swithin's. There was a heavy sea running; but the lifeboat was soon manned, and our old friend Hairblower himself took the stroke-oar, and manfully those gallant fellows pulled till they reached the wreck. They had fallen in with the ship's boats about half-way from the shore, and now brought the welcome news of their almost undoubted safety.

'To think of you and Master Charles being aboard, sir,' said Hairblower, who seemed to consider the whole matter of the wreck as an everyday occurrence. 'This is, indeed, what may well be called 'a circumstance,' if ever there was 'a circumstance' hereaway,' and he settled his two friends comfortably in the stern

of the life-boat, ere he busied himself to place the rest of the rescued seamen where they would least interfere with the efforts of the oarsmen. They were soon safely disposed, and by sundown, wet, weary and exhausted, they stood once more upon that shore which they had scarcely dared to hope they should ever see again.

When Charlie woke the following morning in a comfortable room at the Royal Hotel, the first person that greeted his opening eyes was honest Hairblower. That worthy had taken entire possession of his former *protégé,* and now made his appearance with a steaming glass of hot brandy-and-water, the only orthodox breakfast, in his opinion, for a man who had been wrecked the day before; though rather disgusted at Charlie's obstinacy in refusing this specific, he was extremely anxious to assist him through his toilet, and was only to be got rid of by an assurance that his young favourite would be down to breakfast, where he would answer all his questions and listen to all his protestations, in an incredibly short space of time. Hairblower accordingly drank the brandy-and-water himself, and waited patiently, during what appeared to him an unreasonably long period to spend in the process of adornment.

When Frank and Charlie met in the coffee-room, the sailor too made his appearance, and, with much circumlocution, managed to deliver himself of a

request which had evidently been all the morning brewing in his mind.

'If it was not a liberty, Master Charles, and you too, Mr. Hardingstone, I should make bold to ask of you both to let me join company in a cruise. I conclude, as you 're bound to London this afternoon at the latest,—soon as ever you 've got rigged out decent and presentable. Well, gentlemen, you see I 've a little business, too, in London-town. I haven't been there not since, Mr. Hardingstone, you lent me a hand so kind, and I 've got to be there, sooner or later, about the fishing-business; for you see, my mates, they wish me to be spokesman-like with our governor, and he can't leave London—so, in course, I must go to him. Now, if it wasn't too great a liberty, I should be proud if you gentlemen would let me wait upon you, just for the voyage like. I can't bear to part with you so soon, and though you 've no luggage, seeing all your traps is still aboard, and spoilt by now, and I can't be useful to you, I should like just to see you and Master Charlie safe into London-town, and shake you both by the hand there afore we part.'

Need we say, the permission was joyfully granted, and that the afternoon train bore the trio in company to the metropolis, whence Charlie and Frank were to start next day together for Newton-Hollows.

CHAPTER XXIV.

King Crack.

THE TOAD WITHOUT THE JEWEL—AN INCLINED PLANE—TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE—THE FIRST PARALLEL—THE FAMILY GONE OUT—A PLAN OF THE CITADEL—HOW TO GET IN—NO QUARTER—A TRIP BY RAIL—STRANGE COMPANY.

'SWEET are the uses of adversity' to some malleable natures, which bending to the storm, rise from it softened and refreshed as from an April shower; but there are desperate and rebellious spirits on whom grief and misfortune seem to have an exactly opposite effect. Such are more prone to kindle into resistance or smoulder in despair, and whilst the humbled penitent kneels meekly to kiss the rod, the hardened offender gnashes his teeth in impotent fury, and glories in his mad career as he forces himself from bad to worse, even to the very threshold of destruction—'game,' as the poor fool calls it, 'game to the last.'

Such was the disposition of Tom Blacke. When his child died, the whole of his better nature seemed to have followed the infant to the grave. He had nothing now to care for in the world; and it is needless to enlarge upon the danger of such a state. His

wife's misconduct, for she poor woman, maddened by despair, had but followed her husband's example in drowning sorrow with drunkenness, added fuel to the flames; and Tom was descending just as gradually and as surely as one who walks step by step into a cellar, down, down into the lowest abyss of infamy and crime. The gradations are imperceptible, there are many windings in the path; but it never fails to terminate in the black gulf. At first the wayfarer may be easily checked and turned aside; but every onward step increases his velocity and his helplessness (the laws of gravitation are no less true in the moral than the physical world), and though a gossamer might have held him at starting, a chain of iron shall not break his fall as he nears the bottom. The beginning too is insidious as it is effectual. The cheerful glass, the harbinger of good fellowship and kindliness, who would be such a churl as to deny a man the harmless pleasure of indulging in moderation with a friend? But one cheerful glass creates a craving for another, and ere long the liquor begins to have a charm of its own independent of the company. Then the dose must be increased or it loses it power, and nightly indulgence begins to be followed by daily reaction, so a trifling stimulant is taken in the morning just to steady the nerves, and keep the cold out, a salutary precaution in this damp climate! Then the pleasure becomes a necessity, and partial intoxication begins to be the normal

condition of the man. Meanwhile the habit is expensive, but who can doubt that the moral sense becomes blunted in so unnatural a state? and the drain on his means is supplied by the toper's application of his wages or other resources to his own brutal gratification. Self-indulgence soon destroys the sense of self-respect, and the temptation to procure money is irresistible, for without money how can he purchase drink? So the man first begins to lie, then to cheat, and lastly to steal. He has now arrived at the second stage in his downward journey. He has enlisted in a profession which has its rules, its customs, its triumphs, nay, to a certain extent its pleasures, but from which there is no release. The drunkard is now a thief, and to deaden the stings of conscience, no less a drunkard still. Then comes madness, for a state of habitual excitement can but be called madness, and visions of daring recklessness rise in the brandy-sodden brain—perhaps a sort of false ambition to triumph amongst his fellow-ruffians impels him to crimes of deeper dye than any he has yet contemplated, perhaps a vague longing for peril, perhaps a morbid thirst for blood. The wretch plots under the inspiration of brandy, and spurs himself to action with the same maddening stimulant. His nerves fail him at the critical moment, or the frenzy of despair dyes his hand with the ineffaceable stain of murder. In the one case, a living death in the hulk separates him for ever from his fellow-men;

in the other, the just retaliation of the law leaves his body quivering on the gallows, whilst his name becomes a byeword and a curse in the mouths of generations yet unborn. This is the third and last stage of the downward journey; further we dare not follow the culprit, but few arrive at this awful ending without having gone regularly through all the previous gradations. Tom Blacke had only reached the second stage. He was now a professional thief and receiver of stolen goods. The lodgings in the Mews could now show curiosities and valuables that any one but a policeman would have been surprised to find in such a place. Gold watches, silks, and shawls and trinkets, yards of brocade, ells of lace, and last, not least, a caldron always on the boil for the manufacture of that all-absorbing fluid which is called 'white soup,' and sold by the ounce, surrounded the once virtuous Gingham in her once respectable home. She, too, was on the downward track, and she drank to stupify the sense of guilt, which she could not altogether stifle, and from which she had not energy to extricate herself. Mr. Blacke, however, as he began again to be called, allowed no conscientious scruples to interfere with business. He dressed well now, always had plenty of money at command, might be seen at many places of public resort, and though aware that the police had their eye on him—to use a common expression, that they were only giving him 'rope enough to hang himself,' and would undoubt-

edly 'want' him ere long, he appeared resolved to live out his little hour with the usual blind recklessness and infatuation of his kind.

Blacke was a plotting villain, and he had been for some time meditating a daring sweep that should eclipse all his previous doings, *and, if not thwarted,* realise a share of booty that would place him above want for the rest of his life. In order to discover and frustrate his plans, we must take the liberty of overhearing a conversation carried on between him and his confederate, in a small snug parlour off the bar of that very public-house in which Hairblower had been so shamefully hocussed and robbed on his former visit to the metropolis, an excursion he was not likely soon to forget.

'Bring a quartern of gin,' said Tom to the flaunting maid who waited on him, as he took his seat at the council-table, with a bloodshot eye and shaking hand, that showed such a stimulus was by no means unnecessary. 'Shut the door, girl,' he added, in a threatening voice, as the undiluted spirit was placed on the table between him and his companion; 'this gentleman and me has matters of business to talk over, see that we're not disturbed,—d'ye understand?' The girl gave a saucy smile of intelligence, and left the two worthies to their consultation.

'My service to you,' said Tom, abruptly, as he lifted a brimming wine-glass full of gin to his shaking lips.

'Here's luck,' laconically replied the gentleman addressed, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, and turning his glass down upon the table to show how religiously he had drained every drop.

There was an ominous silence—Tom felt the moment had arrived to explain the whole of his plans, and he paused a little, like some skilful general, as he ran over in his mind how he should impart them in the clearest manner to his companion, a man of somewhat obtuse intellect, though strong and resolute in action, and who was indeed no other than Mr. Fibbes. That worthy's appearance had decidedly changed for the worse, since we had the honour of making his acquaintance at the truly British game of skittles, or even since we last took leave of him in earnest conversation with his patron, Major D'Orville. He had sustained two domestic afflictions, from each of which he had suffered severely, the one in the loss of his little black-eyed wife who had been suddenly taken from him, and who, although, as he himself said, she was a 'rum 'un when she was raised,' had certainly kept him out of a deal of mischief, the other in the premature death of his pride and prime favourite Jessie, whose sufferings during distemper and subsequent dissolution he averred would have moved 'a 'eart of stone.' Under the influence of these combined sorrows, Mr. Fibbes had neglected his person, and taken more decidedly to drinking than formerly, and was now

seldom or never in his right senses, a fact sufficiently attested by his bloated red face, his dull leaden eye, and general appearance of dissolute recklessness. He was indeed ripe for mischief, or to use his own words, 'up to anythink, from skinning a pig to smothering a Harch Bishop,' a frame of mind very likely to lead to dangerous consequences. Tom filled his glass once more, and opened the plan of his campaign.

'It must be done to-night, Mr. Fibbes,' he remarked, with polite energy, 'this is the last night we can manage it cleverly, on account of the moon. See now—I've been down in the neighbourhood to make sure. My missis, she knows the place as well as I know you. Bless you! she was bred and born there. But I wouldn't trust to that. I've been waitin' down about there for a week. At last, the family they all goes out a hairin' in the pheaton or what not—I walks boldly up to the front door and rings the bell. Up comes the housekeeper, all in a fluster, settling of a clean cap,—thinks I, the footman's gone with the carriage, and the butler's out shootin', and directly his back's turned, the under butler he's off courtin', and the boy when the coast's clear, he runs out to play cricket, so there's no one left but the women—trust me for managin' of *them*.'

'Good,' said Mr. Fibbes approvingly, as he filled and emptied his glass.

"'Is the General at home?' says I, quite promiscuous, and looking up and down the portico like a harchitect.

"'No, sir,' says she, politely enough, 'did you wish to see him?'

"'It 's of no consequence,' says I, pulling a bundle of prints and a measuring line out of my pocket, 'merely a small matter of business; the General's confidential servant would do as well.' Ye see, I knowed the butler was out, else he 'd have answered the door.

"'Perhaps you 'll leave a message, sir,' says she.

"'Oh, ma'am,' says I, 'it 's a matter of no importance, only I *am* going to town by the train to-night. Perhaps, ma'am, as you seem to be the governess, or a relative of the family, you might give me permission to do all I want.'

"'What is it?' says she, looking as pleased as Punch.

"'Well, ma'am,' says I, 'the fact is, I 'm engaged in preparing a work for publication that shall comprise all the principal seats of the nobility and gentry in the Midland Counties; would you oblige me by glancing over the proofs? and if there are any that strike your fancy, pray favour me by acceptin' of them,' says I. 'Your noble family owns one of the finest residences we have yet surveyed, and we shall be proud to do justice to it."

'Good,' again grunted Mr. Fibbes, who was begin-

ning to weary of the detail, and wanted more gin to keep him awake.

'Well,' resumed Tom, 'with that she takes me into the hall, and shows me over the drawing-room, and the dining-room, and the conservatories; and she stops and pints out a statue—rank indecent, I calls it, without a rag of clothin' to bless itself—and the pictures, and what not; but I wasn't satisfied with this here; what I wanted was to know where the plunder was stowed, and though pictures may be very profitable to them as sells 'em, the plate-basket's more in my line of business than those shammy gold frames that make such a show, and is'nt worth half-a-crown a yard. 'You'll excuse me, Miss,' says I (they likes best to be called Miss when the bloom 's off 'em a little) 'but I've always understood as the offices in this house is a perfect pattern as regards servants' accommodation and general arrangement. Now, my governor, he's building a country residence for the Earl of Aircastle, and if it wasn't takin' too great a liberty, and I might ask to be allowed to inspect the basement, I could get a hint or two that would please his lordship, who's a very particular man—uncommon.' With that she hesitated a little, and looked hard at me, so I goes at her again: 'I wouldn't detain *you*, Miss,' says I, 'but perhaps you'd be so good as to ring for any of the hupper-servants, and they could do all I want.'

''Oh,' says she, smiling again, 'I'll show you over

the offices myself.' With that, bless'd if she didn't take me downstairs, and walk me through the sculleries, and the kitchen, and the pantry, and the servants' hall, and the back kitchen, and the housemaid's closets—precious corners they was, too, for a game of hide-and-seek—and the butler's room, where he sleeps the night's he isn't off to Bubbleton on the sly; and I could put my hand on the plate-chest in the dark, and I know where the General keeps his money, and there's gold watches and such like in the drawing-room, that would make a matter of a hundred pounds directly they saw old Sharon's back-shop; and I kept my eyes open, as you may easily believe, and I've got it all in my head now, let alone a bit of a plan I've taken of the place just in the rough,' and with this Tom pulled a sheet of paper out of his pocket, and proceeded with its aid to elucidate the manœuvres he proposed to put in practice. 'You and I can do it all,' said Tom, 'just the same as we stripped the old hall near Devizes. I don't relish more than two, not if a job's any way ticklish, and I do like to finish off my work neatly, I confess. Now look ye here, Mr. Fibbes, this is how we'll act—the station's not ten minutes' walk from the house, and the mail train stops there about 12·50. There's a luggage train comes by about three in the mornin' that would bring us back quite handy, and we should have plenty of time to finish off handsome, and so be home to breakfast.

Take another drain, Mr. Fibbes, talking 's dry work.'

Mr. Fibbes seemed to think the same of listening, and acquiesced with great good-will.

Tom Blacke got up, opened the door to see no one was eaves-dropping, peeped into the cupboard, and into a red-curtained snuggery off the bar, commanded by a small window in the room he now occupied; and having satisfied himself that both were empty, proceeded to unfold his plans.

'We 'll leave the trap behind us this turn, Mr. Fibbes. We can carry all *we* shall want; there 's my light valise and the blue bag will hold everything; we shan't take anything that 's very hot, nor yet very heavy. You mind to put on the green spectacles, just for the journey, and I 'll be the man with the prospectuses, the same as before, for the station-master's a smart chap, and may-be he 'll know me again.'

'I mus'n't forget the jemmy,' grunted Mr. Fibbes.

'The jemmy,' replied Tom, in a tone of injured feeling, 'what 's the use of the jemmy? this ain't a rough job, Mr. Fibbes; you seem to take no pride in your profession! No, no, you just put the centre-bit in your coat pocket for a precaution, and leave the rest to me. The back scullery's our place; it 's got a regular sash window, and opens with a common hasp; there 's a shutter, too, but I see a cobweb across it when I was there, and I think may-be they

sometimes forget to fasten it. So you and me we alights at the station, as though to walk into Bubbleton, then we come quietly up to the house, takes a bit of brown paper and treacle, and so breaks a pane in that scullery-window without a chink of noise, then in goes a hand to unhasp it, and you and me, Mr. Fibbes, we walks in without a hinvitation. Now look you here,' and Tom produced his chart of the interior, 'we goes quietly into the butler's room—he's safe to be at Bubbleton, because it 's a theatre night —we takes a piece out of the cupboard with a centre-bit—none of your noisy jemmies—and we stows away the plate in the blue bag; then we creeps along the passage, and so up the back stairs there (pointing to this plan with his finger) into the drawing-room; and here, Mr. Fibbes, I shall want your assistance, in case of haccidents. Ye see one of the ladies she sleeps above the drawing-room, and ladies is mostly light sleepers. Now from what I've heard tell of this one—the governess she was—she 's as likely as not to come down if she hears any disturbance. She might know *me*, for she 's seen me along of my missis in Grosvenor Square. If she should walk in—take another drain, Mr. Fibbes—what 's that noise?' broke off Tom abruptly, his white face bearded with perspiration, and his lip working in guilty trepidation.

'Noise, there 's no noise,' replied his confederate, looking doggedly up to him, though a strange light

shone too in his bloodshot eyes, 'if she *should* walk in, what then?'

'Why, run the long knife into her,' hissed out the less daring villain, 'it makes no noise, and she'll tell no tales.'

'Share and share alike, and it's a bargain,' said Mr. Fibbes, dashing his great hand heavily down on the table. 'D— me, Tom, you're a deep un; you put me in front in that last job, and so help me I didn't clear five pounds. I'll have none of these games this turn, and if I *have* to whip out the 'bread-winner' I'll be allowed something handsome over and above, see if I won't.'

'Of course, Mr. Fibbes,' replied Tom, 'honour amongst gentlemen. You understand the plan now, I think, or would you like me to go over it once more?'

'Bother the plan,' remarked Mr. Fibbes, who was a man of action rather than a man of science, 'let's have another quartern and be off—why it's gettin' dark now.'

'Easy,' said Tom, 'we'll just call at my place for the instruments, and so walk on to the station. It's a nice fresh night for a jaunt into the country; but what a thing it is when gentlemen can combine business with pleasure!'

Mr. Fibbes grunted a hoarse laugh of approbation, and, having finished their gin, these two worthy members of society walked off, arm-in-arm, on their

nefarious expedition. It is needless to say that Newton-Hollows was the house for which they were bound. General Bounce and his unconscious family, resting peacefully and securely as usual, were to be robbed, and if any resistance arose were to be murdered before daylight, and this because Tom Blacke, being, as he said, connected with them by marriage, and having received many acts of kindness from the warm-hearted old General, had obtained a sufficient knowledge of the inside of his dwelling and the habits of his household, to make a descent upon his property with every prospect of success. After a vehement discussion with Mr. Fibbes, who was extremely anxious to travel first-class, and whose aristocratic prejudices were so shocked when he found his confederate would by no means consent to this imprudent arrangement, that he nearly threw up the job altogether, the worthy couple stowed themselves away in a roomy compartment of the second-class, and were soon steaming along from the lights of London, into the dark broken masses of the cool fresh country.

Though, in this instance, the power of steam seemed friendly to the purpose of these two finished ruffians, they could not divest themselves of certain superstitious misgivings, which probably they would not have entertained had they been bounding along on two free-going horses, like the gentlemen high-

waymen of the olden time, or even bowling merrily down the road in the light spring-cart, and behind the 'varmint' bay mare that made the pride of a cracksman in the early part of the present century. But the rail! there was a deal of insecurity about the rail. That electric telegraph, too, was the devil. At every station they almost expected to see the face of some too-well known detective, glaring in behind the station-master's lamp, and to hear the unwelcome though civil greeting with which he would request the favour of their company. Then might he not be even now in the next carriage, separated from them by that half-inch of wood-work. Mr. Fibbes scowled, as he contemplated the possibility of such proximity, and clutched more than once at the long knife. Still they sped on uninterrupted; half the journey was already satisfactorily performed. A succession of respectable good-humoured second-class passengers got in and out, and handed their bundles, and pattens, and umbrellas across the two housebreakers, and entered into conversation with them, and thought the dark smaller man a vastly accommodating person, and his morose companion a stout well-to-do grazier coming home from Smithfield, judging of them just as we cannot help judging of our temporary companions, particularly when travelling, and making, probably, no worse shots than we all do in these fancy-biographies *à la minute*. But there was a man

in the next carriage to the two professionals who puzzled everybody. A stout fellow he was, with a shiny hat, but no power on earth could get him to utter a syllable. Some thought he was dumb, and some made sure he was drunk.

CHAPTER XXV.

'Dulce Domum.'

HALF-ENGAGED—THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER—SELF-SACRIFICE—'DINNER'S ON THE TABLE!'—'THE MEMENTO MORI'—AN ADVOCATE FOR MATRIMONY—A FAIR GOOD NIGHT.

WE must return to Newton-Hollows, now mellowing in the last tints of fading autumn, its dahlias already cut off by the morning frosts, its well-kept gravel-walks, despite the gardener and his staff, strewed here and there with the withered leaves of the declining year. A light mist, rising in smoke-wreaths from the sward, anticipates the early twilight of the shortening day, and the fire burning brightly in the library, is none the less acceptable for its contrast to the gathering shades of out-of-doors, which seem to stalk nearer and nearer to the unshuttered windows.

Blanche has just come in, fresh and blooming, from an errand of mercy amongst the poor in the adjoining village. Her bonnet is even now hanging on her arm, and her long clustering hair is damp and limp with the dews of evening. Is that a tear clinging to her eyelashes? or is it only the moisture of heaven caught as it fell, and prisoned in those

silken meshes? Blanche is often in tears now, and loves to be alone. She and Mary ride and walk together, as usual, but the unreserved confidence that used to exist between them is gone. It has been dying a natural death ever since the former paid her memorable visit at Frank Hardingstone's hotel, and though it has flickered up again with an expiring flash or two, it is now finally extinct. Our young lady has aged much since her thoughtless days of only last spring. Pique, disappointment, anxiety, and self-communing have been doing their work silently and surely, shading the fair young brow indeed, but at the same time tempering and mellowing the careless buoyant heart. Blanche has begun to find that life is not all *couleur de rose,* even for the young, and the lesson has not been without its usual salutary effect. Though no longer the wealthy heiress, and to do her justice she seldom dwells upon that as a misfortune, she is beginning to feel that she too has a part to act on the stage of life, or rather, that no longer acting the vain part of everyday frivolity, she has a *reality* to fulfil. So she is never so happy now as when busying herself about her poor people, her decrepid old women, and her little ragged children, to whom she does acts of unassuming kindness, in the performance of which she forgets her own annoyances and heart-burnings, though her woman-nature is as yet but half trained, and she has occasional fits of despondency and bursts

of reactionary sorrow, which make her very unhappy for the time. Blanche has had a fresh grievance too for the last few days, connected, of all things in the world, with cousin Charlie's return, that return which was to have been such a jubilee of rejoicing, and which she now almost dreads to look forward to. The girl feels as if she had lost her self-respect, and turn which way she will, the sting ever rankles in her breast, ever reminds her of what she chooses to consider her degradation. The fact is she has sustained an interview with Uncle Baldwin, in the formidable study; and the General, who is not given to beat about the bush, when he has an object in view, has developed to her, in as few words as possible, his projects for her future welfare, and proposed to her, point blank, that on her cousin's return from abroad she should marry him forthwith. Blanche, as in nature bound, made sundry hesitating objections, all of which her uncle chose to consider as mere maiden modesty, *de rigueur* on such an occasion, and as Blanche could not say she *didn't like him*, and as Uncle Baldwin had always been so kind, in fact a second father to her, and made such a point of it, and it would prevent Charlie going back to those horrid Kaffirs, and was to make them all so happy, and, above all, had been her dearest mother's wish, why the girl gave in, as girls often do on the most important topic of their lives, paralysed, as it would seem, by the amount of the stake at issue, and yielded

a sort of conditional half-promise, when, notwithstanding the bursts of applause that it met with from the General, the instant it passed her lips, she would have given worlds to be able to recall. But there was another consideration, buried deep in Blanche's little heart, which, although she would have been very angry to be told so, although she would not allow it even to herself, had far more weight in inducing her to listen favourably to these advances on the part of her unconscious cousin, than all the General's skilful sophistry and affectionate eloquence; and this was a feeling which, as it is the usual accompaniment of love, resembles that epidemic in so far, that where it rages most fiercely it is invariably most stoutly denied. Men take it freely enough, and when under its influence commit sundry absurdities, which, if they make 'angels weep,' certainly make their fellow-mortals laugh, and of which they have generally the grace to be heartily ashamed; but with women, as we believe its seeds are never altogether dormant in those gentle beings, so its virulence, when unchecked, pervades their whole system, and one of its commonest and least startling effects is that species of moral suicide which is best described by the vulgar adage of 'cutting off one's nose to spite one's face,' and which produces that most incomprehensible of all vagaries, termed 'marrying out of pique.'

Now we need hardly say, that we have written in

vain 'for that dull elf who cannot picture to himself' how Blanche Kettering, from her very pinafore-days, had been over head and ears in love with Frank Hardingstone: not a very sufficient reason, it may be said, for consenting to marry some one else; but yet a natural consequence of that inverted state of feelings we have described above, which, under the name of jealousy, is capable of more extravagant feats than this. And of whom was pretty Blanche jealous? Why, of her own fast friend and dearest associate, the peerless Mary Delaval! The more she thought over the characters of the two so suited to each other in every possible way—which very similarity Blanche was not philosopher enough to perceive was an insuperable obstacle to any tenderer feeling than respect—the more she considered their corresponding strength of mind and hardihood of spirit—their equally high standard of worth and elevation of sentiment—the more she reflected on the opinions she had heard each of them express (the bass notes of that moral duet had sunk deep into her heart)—the more she thought over that memorable day, when, at a word from Mary, and at a moment's notice, Frank had started for South Africa, without so much as coming to wish her (Blanche) good-bye—the more her heart sank within her as she linked those two commanding figures in the halo of love, blurred even to her mental vision by the tears which filled her eyes as she contemplated the bare idea of

such an union. Blanche had long struggled against this feeling; she had hoped against hope, as she firmly believed, rather than give Frank Hardingstone up: but now she would deceive herself no more; he was actually corresponding with Mrs. Delaval, which, to say the least of it, she must confess was very indelicate. This was the second letter Mary had received from him. Why had he written to Mary from the Cape? It was surely very strange; and Mary had never offered to show her either of the letters—of course she would rather die than *ask* to see them. Poor Blanche! little do you guess the cause of your friend's unusual reserve as regarded these important missives. Mary Delaval, quickened by her own experience of a hopeless love, saw it all —saw that her high-minded, manly correspondent was devoted heart and soul to Blanche; and she pitied him, even as she pitied herself, for a misplaced attachment. But it was not for *her*, of all people, to do aught that might shake Blanche's affection for Cousin Charlie—*she* could not be so selfish, so traitorous, as to lend her assistance to anything, however slight, that might in the most remote manner wean Blanche from her cousin, and leave him free. So Mary, treasuring the letter, as containing oft-repeated mention of the beloved name, placed it in her bosom, but did not volunteer to show a single line of it to a living soul. Therefore is Blanche desponding and unhappy; therefore, as gloomy thoughts

sweep like shadows across her mind, the tears gather in her eyes, as she leans her head upon the marble chimney-piece, and sorrows all alone in the deepening twilight.

'And this is the day I thought I was to have been so happy,' thinks poor Blanche; 'the day I have been looking forward to ever since we heard Charlie was coming home. Ah! I wish I could meet him now as I used to do in the happy days when we knew nothing about marrying and money, and family arrangements. And poor Charlie, after all his sufferings!—Uncle Baldwin says it will break his heart if I don't marry him. And dear mamma, if she had lived, she would have been so glad to see it all settled. And so I suppose it *must* be; and then Mr. Hardingstone will very likely marry *her*, and everybody will be happy and contented but *me*. Ah! well, there must always be some one sacrificed; and I suppose I must be the victim this time: but it *is* hard to give up all my hope, all my sunshine—to have no future any more. Yes; I hear the autumn wind sighing round the house. I am not yet twenty; and it will be all autumn to me for the rest of my life. Oh, it *is* hard—very hard!' and Blanche pressed her brow against the chimney-piece and wept bitterly.

'Blanche, dearest Blanche, what is it?' whispered a gentle voice close beside her, and she felt Mary Delaval's arm passed caressingly round her waist. Blanche

started up, and checked her tears. She could have borne anything but this. She could not endure to be consoled by her triumphant rival. 'Nothing,' she replied, withdrawing herself almost rudely from the encircling arm, 'Nothing; I'm only tired and nervous, waiting for these people. I think I'll go and dress, for it's getting late; and—I think—I think I'll go by myself, Mrs. Delaval,' said Blanche; and she hurried away, leaving Mary surprised and hurt at the first unkind words she had ever heard from Blanche's lips. 'Anything but that,' said the girl as she walked up-stairs, swelling with indignation; 'anything but that *she* should come and *triumph* over me.' And she banged her door angrily; and Mary, in the drawing-room, heard it, and was grieved.

Triumph, indeed!—was that poor pale face one of *triumph?* Were those deep eyes, hollowing day by day; that sad brow on which care seemed visibly to rest, as a cloud rests upon the hill, and softens even while it darkens—were these the outward signs of satisfied affection and *triumphant* love? Blanche, Blanche, you think yourself very unhappy; but little do you know the struggle going on in the bosom of that faithful friend with whom you are now so unjustly at variance. Little do you guess that she has torn the one only image, the fulfilment of the ideal of a lifetime, from her heart, and vowed to worship it no more; and prayed that the very thought which made the sunshine of her existence, might pass

away; and all for you. So it is in life: we make a sacrifice which costs us nothing; we give that which perhaps we are all well satisfied to get rid of; and the world says 'How noble! how generous! how disinterested!' or we yield up the one dear hope that has cheered us all our journey; we consent to travel the rest of the way in darkness, and dreariness, and listless despair, and the world thinks us only stupid and disagreeable; those who look below the surface perhaps suggest that we are bilious; and the one for whom we have made all this ruin, for whose well-being and security we are stretched helpless, exhausted, bleeding by the way, thanks us blandly at the most, and takes it much as a matter of course, and passes by very likely on the other side.

But 'fight who will and die who may,' the outward world goes on much the same notwithstanding. The clock goes round, and dinner-time arrives; and whatever may be the sorrow brooded over and locked up in the inner life, we dress for dinner when the time comes, and look in the glass, and dry our eyes, and have a glass of sherry after our soup; and the tyrant Custom, and the motley jester Society, bid us sit between them; and this woos from us a vapid smile, and that lays his iron hand upon our brow and dares us to stir; and we are all the better for the hypocrisy and the restraint.

Thus, although the ringing of the door-bell that announced the long-expected arrival of the guests

from Africa vibrated through the very hearts of the ladies in their dressing-rooms, even as it vibrated through the ground-floors and offices of Newton-Hollows, we are not to suppose that it crumpled a fold of muslin or moved a single ringlet out of its place with its agitating summons. Below-stairs, indeed, the old butler settled himself hastily into his coat, and rushed to the door with as hearty a welcome for the travellers as if it had been his own house; whilst from a gallery that overlooked the hall, divers lighted candles might be seen glancing, and pretty faces looking down from beneath smart caps, all eager to get a glimpse at Cousin Charlie, whose wounds and exploits had made him a second Roland in the estimation of these admiring damsels; while sundry exclamations might have been overheard, as 'Which is him?' 'That's Master Charles, him in the pea-jacket.' 'Lor, how thin he's growed;' and 'Well, he's a genteel figure, let alone those 'orrid moustaches,' from the upper housemaid, who was a new acquisition since Charlie's departure, and having once been engaged to a journeyman glazier, thought herself a judge of young men. But the General had rushed from his den in the mean time, half-dressed as he was, and had pulled Charlie into the well-lighted drawing-room, and had shaken Frank Hardingstone a hundred times by the hand, and was never tired of reiterating his welcome, and his delight at seeing them both once more.

'God bless you, Frank!' exclaimed the General for the twelfth time, as he figetted about the room in braces and shirt-sleeves. 'What? you 've brought him back safe and well—D—— me, sir (God forgive me for swearing), I tell you I 'll *never* forget it. Zounds, don't tell me! Brought him back, sir, like a resurrectionist! I never thought to see this day, sir—I tell ye—Gratitude! how d 'ye mean? And you, Charlie, my trump of a boy—thanked in Orders—general Orders, by all the gods of war! Ah, I hadn't lectured you over the old port for nothing. You took 'em in flank, the rascals. *In flank*, or I 'll eat 'em. Don't tell *me;* couldn't be done otherwise. Lads! lads! it 's too much: you make me feel like a child again. What?' and the old General's eyes began to overflow with the fulness at his heart; so he relapsed into a state of unusual gruffness, and stirred the fire fiercely to conceal his emotion; and finally hurried them off to dress. 'None of your licentious camp habits here, Charlie. Dine to a minute, you dog! I trust, you 'll find your room comfortable, Frank, my boy. I saw to the fire myself not half-an-hour ago. What? Ring for what you *want*, and my servants will bring you what they *have*.' So the old gentleman toddled off to finish his own personal adornment, and the guests, with beating hearts, well concealed from each other, proceeded to despatch theirs as quickly as might be.

If ever there was a banquet that to all appearance

should have been one of triumphant hilarity, it was the sumptuous dinner to which our party sat down that day in the bright, warm, cheerful dining-room at Newton-Hollows. Notwithstanding Lady Mount Helicon's sneers, no man understood better than the General that process which is conventionally termed 'doing things well.' The servants glided about noiselessly as if shod with velvet—the doors were never left open, still less closed with a bang—no bumps and thumps of tray-corners against projecting wood-work disturbed the conversation, to irritate the host while they alarmed his guests. Nor as the different courses made their appearance, did a gush of cold air accompany them from below stairs, tainted but not warmed by the odours borne with it from the kitchen. The soup was as hot as the plates, the champagne iced to a turn, even as the haunch was roasted. Glasses were filled noiselessly by the butler, as a matter of course (by the way an immense pull for the ladies), and everything was handed to everybody at the instant it was wanted, and this, to our humble ideas, is no mean auxiliary to the general success of an entertainment. The old Roman *bon vivant* evidently knew a thing or two about dinner-giving (he called them suppers), or he would not have so dilated on the necessity of attention to trifles, *vilibus in scopis, in mappis*, etc. The General, too, understood these details thoroughly, and therefore it was disrespectful youth voted *nem. con.* that Newton-

Hollows was 'a rare shop at feeding time,' and that 'old Bounce, if he was rather a bore out hunting, was nevertheless the boy to dine with, and no mistake!'

'The boy,' however, on this occasion seemed to have all the hilarity of the meeting to himself. Of the four individuals that constituted his party, each was acting a part, each had set a guard upon his and her lips, and was originating broken disjointed sentences, vainly endeavouring to form a matter-of-course unrestrained conversation. The ladies were even more reserved than the gentlemen. Blanche was thinking how brown and handsome Frank looked after his voyage—so much more manly than her cousin—and wondering why he should say so little to *her*, and yet pay no attention whatever to Mary. That lady again was full of tender alarms and anxieties about 'Cousin Charlie,' his wasted figure, and his frequent cough, and gulping down the tears she could scarcely repress, as she glanced ever and anon at his glittering eye and emaciated face. 'Perhaps,' she thought, 'he will never live after all to be Blanche's husband;' a thrill shot through her at the thought that then he would indeed be all her own: but if this was joy, good faith! it was a joy near akin to tears. As for Frank, he was more in love than ever. Nor indeed is this to be wondered at. If a gentleman, having voluntarily surrendered himself to that epidemic, which, like the measles, we must all go through

sooner or later, and which, like that indisposition of childhood, is prone to cure itself by its own progress —if a gentleman then having undergone a favourable eruption, and, at the very crisis of his disorder, shall voluntarily absent himself from his charmer, to return from a sea-voyage amongst rough companions, and contemplate her for the first time, attired in all the brilliancy of dinner costume, and further embellished by the favourable disposition of light which sets off such entertainments, and which is generally considered highly conducive to female beauty, he need not be surprised to find that he is less a rational being than ever, or that the disease for which absence is considered so unfailing a cure should come out with redoubled virulence under such an interruption of that salutary course. But Frank, though in love, was also disappointed. His hopes had risen most unreasonably since Charlie's disclosures on the evening preceding their memorable shipwreck. He had indulged in such day-dreams as, for a sensible man —which, to do him justice, he generally was—were the acme of absurdity; and now because Blanche had neither thrown herself into his arms when they met—a feat, indeed, she could hardly have conveniently accomplished, 'dinner' being announced at that interesting moment—nor had spoken to him more than she could possibly help, for which reserve she likewise had excellent reasons, the principal one being that she could by no means trust her voice,

our philosophic gentleman was disappointed, forsooth, and consequently hurt, and the least thing sulky. Charlie again, though more at ease in his mind than the others, was tired and exhausted; he was always tired now towards the evening; and although rejoiced to be once more at home, once more gazing his fill on the only face he had ever much cared to look at—an indulgence that partook, he knew not why, of the nature of a stolen pleasure—yet his satisfaction was of that inward kind which does not betray itself by outward signs of mirth, but which, more particularly in failing heath, flows on in a deep, silent current, that to the superficial observer has all the appearance of apathy and cold selfish carelessness.

But the General was in his glory. Fond of eating and drinking himself, his delight was to see his friends eat and drink too, and as he urged on his guests the different good things for both purposes that smoked on the table or sparkled on the sideboard, he monopolised the conversation with the same zest that he demolished a considerable share of the entertainment.

'Charlie, you eat nothing, my boy,' said the General; 'that haunch was roasted a turn too much; let me give you a bit of the grouse? Zounds! we must fatten you up here—what? commissariat disgraceful at the Cape! 'Gad, sir, we wouldn't stand it in India. I broke three commissaries myself in the Deccan, because there was no soda-water in camp—

fact, I pledge you my honour, Mrs. Delaval. I don't believe Charlie's had a morsel to eat since he went into training for the steeple-chase.'

'You wouldn't have said so, if you'd seen him getting well at Fort Beaufort,' remarked Frank, rousing himself from his fit of abstraction, 'his voracity was perfectly frightful! I wish you could have seen him, Miss Kettering, in a black skull cap, as thin as a thread-paper, on crutches, asking every ten minutes what o'clock it was, dreading to die of starvation between two o'clock dinner and five o'clock tea; you never beheld anything so thin and so hungry.'

Blanche laughed her old merry laugh; and Charlie, stealing a look at Mary Delaval, saw her eyes were full of tears. How his heart leapt within him, and how a chill seemed to gather round it the moment after, and curdle his very life-blood, as the possibility flashed across him, that even now it might be *too late*. Too late—he was but twenty-one, yet something warned him that his was no secure tenure, that there might be truth in the startling suspicion that had of late obtruded itself like a death's head on his moments of enjoyment—that the world might be no world for him when autumn again shed her leaves, and the browning copses and cleared fields brought back the merry field-sports he loved so well. No more foot-ball—no more cricket—no more panting excitement and rosy out-of-doors exertion—no more sharp gun-shot ringing through the woodland, nor

hound making music in the dale, nor airy steed careering after the pack, fleeting noiselessly o'er the upland. And though these were hard, bitter hard to leave, 'twas harder still to give up the opening dream of ambition, the budding promise of manhood; and harder, harder than all, the first glowing reality of woman's love. It is well to perish with trust unshaken in that glorious myth; to sleep before that too is discovered to be a dream. But Charlie shook off these moments of despondency with the elasticity of his age and character. In that bright luxurious room, with those friendly faces around him, encircled by beauty, wealth, and refinement, death seemed *impossible.* Have we never felt thus wrapped in security ourselves? and when some 'silver cord has been loosed —some golden bowl broken' from amongst our own immediate associates, have we not felt almost angry at the unmannerly visitor who intrudes thus without knocking, and pauses not to wipe his shoes for Turkey carpet more than sanded floor?—'*Pauperum tabernas regumque turres,*' he has the *entrée* of them all.

The General was a little disappointed with his guests, when, on the retirement of the ladies, a magnum of undeniable claret exhaled its aroma for their immediate benefit, and he found it did not by any means disappear with that military rapidity to which he was accustomed in his younger days. Charlie's cough was a sufficient excuse for his abstemiousness;

and Frank Hardingstone, though he could drink a bucket-full on occasion, would not open his lips on compulsion; so the General found himself in consequence obliged to grapple with the giant almost single-handed. This, to do him justice, he undertook with considerable *gusto*, and by the time he had got to the bottom of his measure, had arrived at that buoyant state in which gentlemen are more prone to broach such matters of business as they may think it expedient to undertake, than to explain clearly the method by which their desired ends can most readily be attained. Accordingly, when Frank and Charlie rose to join the ladies in the drawing-room, our old soldier called the latter back to the fire-place, and filling himself a large bumper of sherry as an orthodox conclusion to the whole, bid his nephew sit down again for five minutes and have a little quiet conversation on a subject which should not be too long postponed. 'Just three words, Charlie,' said the General, sipping his sherry; 'won't you have a white-wash, my boy? Three hundred and sixty-five more glasses in the year, you know. You won't? Well, Charlie, I'm right glad to see you back again. To-morrow I must go over everything with you as regards money matters. Frank has told you all about the will. What? Zounds! it was very singular—I confess I expected it all along.' The General was one of those truest of prophets whose predictions are reserved until the fulfilment of events. Finding that Charlie took this

extraordinary instance of foresight very coolly, he proceeded, as he thought, to beat about the bush in a most skilful manner.

'Well, Charlie, and how d'ye think we're all looking, eh? Wear well and struggle on, don't we? I've taken pretty good care of your cousin for you, my boy, during your absence. How d'ye think she's looking, eh?'

Charlie, who had not thought about it at all, answered, 'Very well.'

And the General filled himself another glass of sherry and went on: 'By Jove, Charlie, I congratulate you on *that*, eh? Shake hands, my lad. Zounds! we'll drink Blanche's health. Now I've put everything *en train*. We can have the lawyers down at a moment's notice. Blanche's *things*, to be sure, will have to be got; women can't do without such a quantity of clothes. Why, when Rummagee Bang's widow was burnt—however, that's neither here nor there. Now tell me, Charlie, when do you think it ought to come off?'

'My dear uncle, I can't think what you are talking about,' replied Charlie, trying to look as if he did n't understand; 'I don't see what I've got to do with Blanche's things.'

'Talking of?' resumed the General, 'why the wedding, to be sure. What else should I be talking of? You're quite prepared, I suppose. I've arranged it all with Blanche; she cried and all that, but *I* know

the sex, Charlie, and *I* could see—zounds, sir! she's *de*-lighted. Never was such an arrangement—keeps all the money together, fulfils every one's intentions. What?—and then it's been such a long attachment, ever since you were both children, corals and long petticoats. Petticoats! How d'ye mean?'

'But, Uncle Baldwin,' pleaded Charlie, with some difficulty getting in a word edgeways, 'don't you think all this is somewhat premature?'

'Premature! what the devil?'—replied the General —'Zounds, sir! not at all premature, quite the contrary, been put off too long, in fact. Never mind, better late than never. These things should be done out of hand. Why, sir, when I was at Cheltenham in '25, the very year of that claret, by the way,' pointing to the empty magnum, 'there was a handsome widow wanted to marry me at twelve hours' notice. Did I ever tell you how I got off, Charlie? 'Gad, sir, Mulligatawney, of the civil service, got me out of the town in a return hearse; but even death couldn't part us, my boy—zounds! she followed me to Bath, and I was laid up on the second floor of the York-house with the scarlet fever—*the scarlet fever!* and I was as well as you are,—till we starved her out; and when they said I was disfigured for life she gave in.' The General chuckled till the tears came into his eyes; then, recollecting his moral was somewhat anti-matrimonial, checked himself into supernatural gravity, and resumed on the other tack.

'But marriage is a respectable state, Charlie; there's nothing like it, so Mulligatawney tells me, to sober a man. Marriage, Charlie,' said the General, oracularly, with a solemn shake of the head, 'marriage is like that empty decanter. It comes in sparkling and blushing, like sunrise on a May morning. What?—You draw the cork, and the first glass is heaven upon earth—that 's the honeymoon; then you fill another—same flavour, but not quite equal to the first. Never mind, try again; so you keep sipping and sipping, to analyze, if you can, the real taste of the beverage, and before you satisfy yourself you come to the end of the bottle; then, sir, when you get to the bottom you can see through it, and you find how empty it is! Not that I mean exactly that,' said the General, again catching himself up, as he found that his metaphor, having taken a wrong turn, had led to a somewhat unexpected conclusion. 'But we can't stop here all night,' added he; 'so tell me, my boy, when I may begin to send out invitations for the breakfast?'

Charlie blushed up all over his emaciated face, as he replied, pulling vehemently at his moustaches, 'Why, uncle, it's best to be explicit, and I like to be straightforward about everything, so I may as well tell you at once, I—I'm hardly prepared to marry, in fact, I'm rather averse to it—in short,' said Charlie, gaining courage as he went on, 'I've no immediate idea of marrying at all, and, with all my

respect and brotherly affection for her, certainly not Blanche.'

'*Certainly not Blanche!*' repeated the General, in something between a shriek and a moan. '*Certainly not Blanche!*—and why, in the name of all that's de—de—disgusting! *certainly not Blanche!* Zounds! I see it all, now, you've got a *black wife*—don't deny it!—a black wife and a swarm of piebald piccaninnies—oh dear! oh dear! that I should live to see this day—I shall never get over it—it's killing me now; ——, I feel it here, sir, in the pit of my stomach! I'll go to bed,' he vociferated, untying his neckcloth on the spot, 'I'll go to bed this instant, and never get up again!' With which lugubrious threat the General, regardless of Charlie's protestations and remonstrances, did in effect stump furiously off to his den, whence his dressing-room bell was forthwith heard pealing with alarming violence; nor did he appear any more that evening, leaving the gentlemen to drag out a weary sitting, still at cross purposes, each in the society of her he loved best in the world.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'Endæmon.'

NIGHT-WALKERS—A 'NICE JOB'—CLEARING THE PLATE-BASKET—JUST IN TIME—DRUM-HEAD COURT-MARTIAL—FIRST-LOVE—A RAT BEHIND THE ARRAS—ON THE TRAIL—AN EFFECTUAL OPIATE.

IT was a soft dark night—such a night as is peculiar to our temperate climate towards the close of autumn. There was no moon, and not a star to be seen, yet was it not *pitch* dark, save under the gigantic trees or in the close shrubberies that surrounded Newton-Hollows. A man could see about ten yards before him, and one bound on an evil errand, by catlike vigilance and circumspection, might have made out the figure of an honest man at that distance, and remained himself unseen. The night-wind sighed gently through the half-stripped hedges; and the fragrance of the few remaining autumnal flowers floated lightly on the breeze. It was a beautiful night for the purpose. 'Quite providential,' Mr. Fibbes said, as clad in a long greatcoat, he stumbled up the dark lane that led from Newton station to General Bounce's residence. His companion made no answer; Tom Blacke was preoccupied and nervous. It may be that the stillness of the

hour, the soothing tendency of all around him, brought back too painfully the innocent days of the Past—it may be that he contemplated with some misgivings the hazardous undertaking of the immediate Future. Mr. Fibbes, however, allowed no such gloomy reflections to influence his spirits, and the pair proceeded in silence, save where the latter stumbling in some unseen rut anathematized the slovenly finish of 'these here country roads,' and sighed for the gas-lit pavement of his beloved London. Once Tom halted, grasping his comrade's arm with a low 'Hush!' and whispering in his ear, 'that there was a step behind them, walking when they walked and stopping when they stopped.'

'Hecho,' replied Mr. Fibbes, accounting for the phenomenon by natural causes, but prefixing a superfluous aspirate to the name of the invisible nymph. 'Hecho,' said he; 'I've often knowed it so—'specially at night. But Tom, what's up, man? blessed if you an't a shakin' all over,—have a drain, man—have a drain!' and the never-failing remedy was forthwith produced in a goodly case-bottle from the greatcoat pocket. Nor did the doctor neglect his own prescription, and much refreshed, the twain proceeded on their way. A slight difficulty occurred in scaling the park-palings, Mr. Fibbes affirming with many oaths that nothing but his weight and the age of his nether garments saved him from being impaled there for life; and the tremendous distur-

bance occasioned by a panic-stricken cock-pheasant, compelled a halt of several minutes' duration, lest the inmates of the Hall should have been aroused by the vociferous rooster. All was at length still—the church clock at Guyville chimed the half-hour after one. The night grew more cloudy and the wind died away into a low moaning whisper. The pair stole across the lawn, like two foul shades returning to the nether world. A heavy foot-mark crushed Blanche's last pet geranium into the mould. Tom shook like an aspen-leaf much to the covert indignation of Mr. Fibbes, and they reach the scullery-window unheard and unsuspected.

'Gently, now!' Why does Tom shake so? and even Mr. Fibbes, with his bull-strength and iron nerves, feel so ill at ease, so willing even now to go back a guiltless trespasser, and leave the job undone? But no—it has been boasted of in anticipation at their flash resorts; what would the professionals think? why, the very detectives would sneer to learn that 'Leary Tom' and 'the Battersea Big-Un,' had been frightened at their own shadows, and after a long journey into the country had returned bootyless to London, the sleepers undisturbed—the 'crib uncracked'—'gently again!'—a jack-daw on the roof brings their hearts into their mouths; were it not for the case-bottle they would 'drop it' even now. Another pause, and Mr. Fibbes summoning all his energies proceeds to act. Gently and stealthily he

produces the brown paper, and the treacle with which it is to be smeared. Lightly he applies it to the selected pane, Tom turning the dark lantern deftly on the job. How ghastly the white face on which a chance ray happens to gleam! Warily—gradually—the heavy hand presses harder, harder still, and the glass gives way; but the faithful treacle absorbs every stray fragment, and not a particle reaches the ground either without or within. Fortune favours the rogues; the shutters have not been put up. They are in for it now, and both gather confidence, Mr. Fibbes assuming the initiative. A large dirty hand gropes through the broken pane, and the hasp of the window is moved cautiously back; but with all their care it gives a slight click, and again they pause and listen with beating hearts. 'The grease,' whispers Mr. Fibbes to his confederate, and the sashes being plentifully smeared with that application, the window opens noiselessly to the top. Admittance thus gained to the body of the place, our housebreakers are now fairly embarked on their enterprise. Their shoes are pulled off and stowed away in their pockets. The centre-bit is got in readiness, and Mr. Fibbes feels the edge of his long knife with a grim sense of dogged, blood-thirsty resolution. All is, however, in their favour. The scullery-door is left open, and they reach the passage on the ground-floor without the slightest noise or hindrance. And here we may remark for the benefit of those who

are affected by nervous apprehensions of their houses being 'burglariously entered and their property feloniously abstracted,' to use the beautiful language of the law—that there is no precautionary measure better worth observing than that of carefully locking *on the outside* the door of every room on the ground floor, and leaving the key in the lock. There are three things, it is said, of which the housebreaker has a professional horror—a little dog loose, an infant unweaned, and a sick person *in extremis*. The first is an abomination seldom permitted where there is anything worth stealing; the second, a misfortune which Nature kindly suffers only to exist at considerable intervals; the third, a calamity to which we may hope not to be subjected *very* often in a lifetime. In the absence then of these unwelcome defences, every door secured as above makes an additional fortification against the enemy. The thief having perhaps effected a skilful and elaborate entrance into your dining-room, where he finds no booty but an extinguished lamp and a volume of family prayers, must commit a fresh burglary before he can reach your study, or wherever you keep your small stock of ready money for household expenses; and though he came in at the window, reversing the usual order of things with an unwelcome visitor, he finds it no easy matter to get out at the door. The probability is he will hardly work through three solid inches of mahogany, for he cannot conveniently pick the lock

if the key is left in it, without some little noise. Thus (although to the damage of your upholstery) you get an additional chance of being aroused, and a few minutes more time to betake yourself to your weapons, whether they consist of an unloaded blunderbuss, a twelve-barrelled revolver (out of order), or a hand-candlestick and a short brass poker. In the meantime your *placens uxor*, uttering piercing shrieks out at window, alarms the country for miles round, and, what is more to the purpose, frightens the robber out of his wits, who decamps incontinently, leaving no farther marks of his visit than a window-frame spoilt, an inkstand or a jar of curry-powder upset, and a small box of lucifer-matches, his own property, and seized on by you as the *spolia opima* of this bloodless victory.

Stealthily, noiselessly, like the tiger on his velvet footfall, our two ruffians glide along the passage, towards the butler's sleeping-room, where the plate is kept. Small need have they of the dark-lantern, so accurately have they studied the plan of the house, so apt are they in their nefarious trade. But they have reckoned without their host upon that official's absence at Bubbleton; the late arrivals from Africa have kept him at home. However, he has been celebrating their return so cordially that, as far as being aroused and making an alarm goes, he might as well be a hundred miles off. They pass the lantern twice or thrice across his sleeping, open-mouthed face,

and Fibbes feels the edge of his knife once more, with devilish ferocity, ere the centre-bit is brought into play, and a hole bored in the plate cupboard, which soon makes the robbers masters of its contents. That receptacle is emptied, and its treasures transferred to the blue bag, with astonishing silence and celerity. The adepts growing bold with impunity, almost regret the deep slumbers of the inmates, sufficiently attested by the prolonged snores resounding from that portion of the basement where the other male servants repose, and arguing that the jollifications of the evening have not been confined to the somnolent butler alone: had the garrison been more on the alert, think the invaders, there would have been more satisfaction in foiling them, and it would have been a 'more creditable job' altogether. Hush! is that a foot-fall along the passage? They stop and listen intently. The kitchen clock ticks loudly throughout the darkness, but other sound is there none. They resume their labours. By this time the plate is packed; the great object of the foray has been attained—melted silver tells no tales—and there is nothing further to be done than to strip the drawing-room of such portable articles as are worth the carrying, and so decamp in triumph. Up the back-stairs they steal. The General hates a door to *slam*, in which aversion we cordially agree with him; and the green-baize one communicating with the offices revolves noiselessly on its hinges. So they

glide though without hindrance, and on past that statue the nudity of which had shocked Tom's sense of propriety on a previous occasion. Mr. Fibbes, who is of a facetious humour when under excitement, seizes the dark-lantern, and turns its glare full upon this work of art, with a high-seasoned joke. They reach the drawing-room door; for the space of a minute they listen intently; prolonged snores from the direction of the General's apartment pervade the house; other sounds there are none. Cautiously the lock is turned, and the door thrown quickly open, that no creaking hinge may betray them by its moan. A gleam of light well-nigh blinds them, accustomed to the darkness of the passages through which they have been groping; and Mr. Fibbes, who enters first, starts back, paralyzed for a moment by the unexpected apparition of a female figure robed in white, and shining like some unearthly being in the strong light of his lantern turned full upon the place she occupies. The figure starts up, and utters a long piercing shriek. There is no time for deliberation; Tom hisses a frightful oath into his confederate's ear, and the big ruffian gripes Blanche's white throat in one hand, whilst the other gropes in his dress for the long knife. Already the blade quivers aloft in the candle-light. Crash!—a terrific blow levels the villain to the floor. Tom, turning madly to escape, finds himself in the powerful grasp of Frank Hardingstone, who shakes

him as a terrier would shake a rat—Frank's extremely airy costume being highly favourable to such muscular exertions. Bells peal all over the house; lights are seen glancing along the passages; female voices rise shrill and high, in scream and sob and voluble inquiry. Charlie and Mary Delaval meet on the stairs and he only exclaims 'What is it? Thank God, *you* are safe!' The General rushes tumultuously down in a scanty cotton garment, disclosing the greater portion of a pair of extremely sturdy supporters, and in which, crowned with a red night-cap and armed moreover with a short brass poker, he presents the appearance of some ancient Roman of 'the baser sort,' inciting his brother plebeians to an agrarian tumult. 'Guard, turn out!' shouts the General, in a voice of thunder. 'Murder! thieves! Let me get at 'em; *only let me get at 'em!*' And he bursts into the drawing-room, where he beholds Frank still shaking Tom Blacke, who is by this time nearly strangled; Blanche in a 'dead faint' on the sofa; Mr. Fibbes' huge body extended senseless on the floor, and standing over him, apparently ready to knock him to shivers again the very instant he should show the slightest symptom of vitality, our old friend, rough, honest, undaunted 'Hairblower!'

* * * *

'Drum-head court-martial!' exclaimed the General as he struggled hastily into a somewhat warmer costume than that which he had worn during the

brunt of the action, 'Drum-head court-martial at three in the morning. Zounds! I only wish I was in India, I'd have 'em hanged in front of the house before breakfast-time. Frank—hollo!—march the prisoners into my study, under escort, my boy, and be d——d to them. No, I will *not* swear,' and the General took his place at his study-table, with all the pomp and circumstance of a district court martial, as the hapless housebreakers, with their arms pinioned behind them, and guarded by the whole male strength of the establishment, were paraded before him, Hairblower bringing up the rear, and keeping his eye steadily fixed on Mr. Fibbes, as if only watching his opportunity for an insubordinate movement on the part of that individual to knock him down again. Mr. Fibbes maintained a dogged silence throughout; save once when he muttered a complimentary remark, containing the figurative expression, 'white-livered son of a ——,' supposed to be explanatory of the state of prostration in which he saw his fellow-prisoner. Tom Blacke was utterly unnerved; he cried, and shook, and staggered like a man with the palsy, and would have gone down on his knees to the General, had he not been forcibly held up by the two tall footmen, who seemed to mistrust even the slightest movement as preparatory to a fresh outbreak of ferocity. 'This once,' pleaded the wretched coward, 'forgive me this once, General—for the sake of my poor wife, Miss

Blanche's maid she was, sir—only this once, and I'll confess all—the forgery and everything—you might transport me for life, but you won't be hard upon me, General—this job wasn't my doing, 'twas him that set me on it, 'twas his plant I'll swear,' pointing to Mr. Fibbes, whose countenance was expressive of intense contempt and disgust. 'Well, muttered that gentleman, as if this was indeed a climax, 'well, I am ——,' something which he certainly was *not*, however much the mode of life he affected might eventually lead to such a consummation. 'Forgery!' exclaimed the General, 'What? Zounds! here's something of importance! swear him—no, he's on his trial—take his words down in writing—forgery indeed!—here's a pretty discovery!' As Blacke became more composed out it all came—how his wife had forged Mrs. Kettering's name, and obtained the legacy, and got the will proved, through that knowledge of the law which he was always ready to turn to evil account—the whole confession, which was indeed full and satisfactory, for he was frightened into telling the truth, closing with another earnest appeal for mercy, and another denunciation of his dogged confederate.

The General was in raptures—Blanche was an heiress once more—even Charlie's contumacious refusal to be married against his will, was now a matter of secondary importance. In his delight he would have let both the rogues go, and pledged himself not

to prosecute them, had Frank Hardingstone not reminded him that the duty he owed to civilized society would hardly admit of such injudicious lenity; so the prisoners were marched off, still under a numerous and voluble escort, and carefully locked into a coal-house, whence, it is needless to observe, they made an easy escape within two hours, when their temporary gaolers, after beer all round, returned to their repose—nor should we omit to mention that they were retaken by the London police within five days, and eventually transported—Mr. Fibbes for fourteen years, and Tom Blacke, in consideration of divers little matters that came up against him, for the term of his natural life.

But in the meantime, the General, his guests, and servants returned to their respective couches. Blanche, after the administration of such restoratives as ladies alone understand, was put to bed by Mary Delaval, who would not leave her till she saw her sink into a quiet refreshing slumber—then the governess too sought her room, and oh! what a happy heart she carried with her to her rest. 'Thank God, *you* are safe!' It was but five words—yet what depths of joy, and hope, and tenderness that short sentence opened up—what a different world it was now—true they were far apart as ever in reality, but she felt that in the bright realms of fancy they were linked in a bond that could never be forgotten—'yes, he loved her.' 'Twas *his cousin's* scream that had

disturbed him in his chamber, 'twas *his cousin*, his betrothed wife as she had once thought, who was in peril and distress; yet in all the hurry and confusion of the moment *she*, the poor governess, was uppermost in his thoughts. 'Thank God,' he said, *you* are safe!'—yes he loved her, he loved her, and he was hers for evermore. They would never be united in the material world, other duties, other affections would supplant her in his outer life, his everyday existence—but when the cloud of sorrow overshadowed him—when joy more than common flooded him in its golden light—when a strain of music, or a gleam of sunshine, or the song of a bird, or the ripple of a stream touched his higher nature—whenever the springs of feeling gushed up in his inmost heart, then would her image rise to vindicate its sovereignty over its spiritual being—then would she claim him and possess him as her own, her *very* own. First love is a fatal illusion—the plant may never come into full bloom, it may blossom but to be cut down—it may be nipped by bitter frosts or rent by the blustering gale—it may be trodden into the dirt by rude feet, and covered by gross mould, or spotted by the slime of trailing reptiles. For years it may be buried and forgotten, yet when the south wind breathes its fragrance over earth, when the gentle rain descends from heaven, its fibres will again put forth their leaves, from its burial-place the meek plant will again raise its head above the surface, and

its perfume will steal over the senses like a sigh from Paradise. So thought Mary with regard to that superstition. To do them justice, women in general cling with wonderful tenacity to this article of their faith. Poor things! they seldom have it in their power to observe it practically, but their adoration in theory for the holiness and inviolability of first love is all the more disinterested and edifying. So Mary lay awake for hours in an ecstasy of happiness, and when she did close her eyes what wonder that her dreams, take whatever shape they would at first, invariably resolved themselves into a circle of merry-makers, and in the middle a figure on its knees before her, with fair upturned face and tender smiling lips, whispering, 'Thank God, *you* are safe!'

It is now high time that we should explain by what fortunate train of circumstances Hairblower and Blanche should have met at that critical moment, when the astonished girl found herself in the grasp of a ruffian, who but for the timely intervention of the seaman's arm, would in all probability have murdered her on the spot. Her champion's own account of his proceeding was so intermixed with professional terms and peculiar phrases, which in his vocabulary possessed an entirely different meaning from that which is found attached to them in *Johnson's Dictionary,* or any other standard authority on the English language—that we prefer giving it in our own words, merely observing that the whole robbery

and rescue was a proceeding which he designated 'special,' and should indeed be considered, so he said, 'a circumstance from beginning to end.'

Hairblower then, having transacted his fishing affairs with his 'governor' as he called him, in which interview, we have since been informed, 'the governor,' a shrewd hard-headed man of business, got very much the better of the seaman, and having failed in his intention of making a ceremonious call on his foreign friends, 'the true blues,' who were then making a tour of the provinces, was irresistibly impelled by a species of morbid curiosity to revisit the scene of his former misfortunes. So he actually turned into the very public-house where he had been robbed on his previous visit to London; and finding no one there but the bar-maid (a late acquisition), very quietly had his dinner and drank his beer in the small snuggery of the bar, which we have mentioned as being lighted by a window from the identical room in which Tom Blacke and Mr. Fibbes were in the habit of holding their nefarious consultations. The seaman had paid for his liquor, and was in the act of departing, in fact the girl thought he had already gone, when the two housebreakers entered the door, and Hairblower, resisting his first impulse, which was to do battle on the spot with the twain, 'one down, t'other come on,' shrank back unobserved into the little room he had been occupying, and taking off his shoes, concealed himself behind an

old fashioned chest that stood against the wall. His first idea was to remain in hiding till the two worthies should have arrived at the height of their jollification, and then bursting in upon their banquet to administer to each what he termed 'his allowance.' The conversation, however, which he overheard was of such a nature as to modify considerably this desire for immediate blows, and when the horrid method of silencing the alarm likely to be raised by some female watcher was discussed in cold blood as a matter of regular business, the listener's hair stood on end as he resolved, come what might, to prevent this deliberate and inhuman murder.

But Hairblower was completely in the dark still as to the 'where' and the 'when' of the intended burglary. He could not therefore warn the inmates nor had he time to inform the police. He could but watch the plotters, lie still, and listen. Little thought Tom Blacke when he looked outside the door and peeped through the red-curtained window, as he imagined to make all safe, that the avenger in the shape of his old sailor friend was within five yards of him; little thought Mr. Fibbes in his acoustic speculations about 'Hecho,' that in this instance, hers was a substantial frame dogging his every footstep, a strong heavy arm ready and willing to strike him to the earth. They thought they were secure at least of all *outside* the house, and they took their measures accordingly.

But honest Hairblower enjoyed one of those enviable organizations to which fear seems positively unknown, and when he reflected that, in his ignorance of where they were bound and when their plot was to be ripe, his only chance was never to let the ruffians out of his sight till he could place them in safe custody, it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world, alone and unarmed, to dog the footsteps of two desperate men, one of whom was an acknowledged murderer. He followed them accordingly from the house; he waited on the opposite side of the street whilst they got their implements from Tom's lodgings; he arrived at the station twenty yards behind them, stole up and heard them take tickets to 'Newton,' took a similar one himself, and sat down in the very next carriage to them, with the collar of his pea-jacket pulled high over his face, and a guard placed upon his lips, lest his old acquaintance should by any means overhear and recognise his voice. As he journeyed down, he thought over every possible plan by which he could frustrate the robbery. If he gave them into custody with the railway people, he could prove nothing; they were two to one; they would not hesitate to swear black was white, and they might easily turn the tables upon him, and perhaps succeed in transferring him to durance vile instead of themselves. If he asked for assistance from a fellow-passenger (and there was one stout-made countryman in whom Hairblower was sorely

tempted to confide), he would probably not be believed, or at any rate the explanation and consequent watching would be very likely to place the ruffians on their guard. No, he would do it all himself. He could rely on his own stout heart and powerful frame; he would hunt them to the world's end. At Newton station great caution was necessary. He remained in the train till they had left the platform, then nimbly jumped out as it was on the point of starting, and delivering up his ticket, got clear of the building in time to distinguish their footsteps stealing up the lane not fifty yards a-head of him. This distance he cautiously diminished. Like most sailors he could see pretty well in the dark, and was used to going barefoot, so taking his shoes off once more, he had no difficulty in keeping within earshot of the chase. At last they reached the house; Hairblower no more knew whose it was than the man in the moon; but he had determined, as soon as they were all safe inside, to make a dash at Tom Blacke, knock him senseless, close with Fibbes, and alarm the inmates; thus, he thought, they will be taken in the fact. Had he known his dear Miss Blanche was in jeopardy, perhaps he might not have been so cool. Fortunately, sailors are so used to every sort of difficulty, that it is next to impossible to put one wrong, and Hairblower managed to creep through the scullery windows nearly as deftly as either of the professionals with whom proficiency in such exercises is a necessary

part of their trade. Whilst they robbed the butler's pantry he stood behind the door; but the moment, he thought, had not yet arrived. In that small room, he calculated, he had hardly space to 'tackle' with them properly, and with admirable coolness waited a better opportunity, and followed them upstairs. As they entered the drawing-room he was close upon them; and had it not been that he was as much startled as Fibbes himself at the apparition of 'Miss Blanche,' his arm would have been raised an instant sooner, and might perhaps have saved that young lady a fainting fit, as it did save her life. As he turned to seize Tom Blacke he beheld him in the grasp of Mr. Hardingstone, and then Hairblower felt indeed that he could have encountered a host; but by this time the house was alarmed, and further violence unnecessary.

Now, although we are aware that it is not customary for well-nurtured damsels to sit with lighted candles in drawing-rooms at an hour when the rest of the family have retired to rest, yet allowances must be made for such as have the misfortune to be in love. This was Blanche's case, and being unable to sleep, she wisely slipped on a dressing-gown, and stole down stairs for the purpose of getting the last new novel, then lying on the drawing-room table, and administering it as the never-failing soporific. When there, she found the room so much more comfortable than her own, that she lit the candles and sat quietly down to

read, till disturbed by what she thought at the moment a frightful apparition. Her delight at recognising Hairblower when she came to her senses was only equalled by the enthusiasm of that formidable auxiliary himself, who with difficulty refrained from embracing her on the spot, a mode of worship in which Frank Hardingstone would willingly have joined. That gentleman, we have reason to think, was in love too; at least, on the night in question he was restless and fidgetty, and courted slumber in vain. Then he heard a door open, and got up and put on a few clothes, and then he fancied he distinguished a stealthy footfall in the passage below; so he too left his room, and arrived on the scene of action in the nick of time. How the disturbance of that night influenced the destiny of several of the party it is not now necessary to state, nor can we tell what Frank saw, heard, or felt, to induce him the following morning to send to Bubbleton for his horses, and to make such arrangements as argued his intention of protracting his visit at Newton-Hollows during some considerable portion of the hunting season. We are satisfied, however, although she did not say so, that this arrangement was by no means unwelcome to Blanche Kettering.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Flood and Field.

A FAMILY PARTY—A HUNTING MORNING—HAND-AND-GLOVE—GONE AWAY!—NEVER MORE—FOLLOW-MY-LEADER.

IT was the last day of the Old Year, and he seemed to have resolved on making a peaceful ending, such as the thirty-first of December seldom vouchsafes in any climate but our own. Thoroughly English, too, was the party assembled round the breakfast-table at Newton-Hollows, from the red face of the old butler struggling in with the hissing urn to the corresponding colour of Frank Hardingstone's coat, betokening that he meant to enjoy our national sport of fox-hunting. Blanche was already down, looking charming in a riding habit, as all pretty women do, and Mary's quiet face showed more animation than usual, perhaps in consequence of an arrangement which was broached apparently not for the first time.

'I am *so* glad we persuaded him not to ride,' observed Blanche, appealing as usual to Mr. Hardingstone; 'he will *not* take care of that cough—men are such bad patients! Now with Mary to drive him in

the pony-carriage, he can keep himself well wrapped-up, and the air will do him good.'

'Undoubtedly,' replied Frank, 'Mrs. Delaval must take good care of her patient' (Mary looked as if she *rather* thought she would); 'and I shall be completely at your service, Miss Kettering; you know I am *not* an enthusiast about hunting, like Charlie.'

'Oh, I shall do very well with old Thomas and Uncle Baldwin, if he can only keep up with me,' replied Blanche; 'so I won't ask you to stay with *me*.'

Frank seemed to think this would be no great sacrifice; but as she spoke the subject of their conversation entered the breakfast-room, and took his place as usual at Mrs. Delaval's side. Poor Charlie! he looked thinner than ever, and the cough, though not so violent, was every day more and more frequent. To be sure his eye was bright, and his colour at times brilliant; everybody seemed to think he was better, save the Bubbleton doctors, and they never would give an opinion one way or the other.

'So Haphazard is to be disappointed of his gallop again,' complained Charlie, as he stretched his wasted hand for his tea-cup. 'I have had quite enough of being nursed, Blanche, even by you. I really think I might ride him, just to see them find. I could get off if I felt tired, you know.'

'Get off when the hounds are running!' replied Blanche, 'not you. Now be a good boy just this once, Charlie. Mary has promised to drive you in

my pony-carriage with Scrub: she says you shall see everything if you'll only trust yourself with her; and nobody will take such care of you as Mary, I know,' added she, rather mischievously. Charlie made no further objections, and Mrs. Delaval kept her eyes immoveably fixed on the pattern of her tea-cup.

'Late, of course—servants always are late, except for dinner. Charlie, my boy, how are ye this morning? You've got no breakfast. Zounds! why is everything cold? Blanche, my sweet girl, ring all the bells, and kick that old fool into next week, if he don't bring hot mutton-chops instanter. I can't stay a moment. I must be off to Snaffles, or he'll make some cursed mistake. It's very singular that nobody ever understands my directions,' said the General, bustling into the room in a state of more than usual ferment, as is generally the case with occasional sportsmen on a hunting morning. The General had been up since daybreak, but had not yet succeeded in snatching a quiet five minutes for his own breakfast; and even now, as he fussed about in a short green coat and high Napoleon boots, it seemed doubtful whether he would settle down to his meal, or be off on another visit to the stables, for the further confusion of the unfortunate Snaffles. Hunger carried it for the moment, but the trampling of hoofs and grinding of wheels on the sweep at the front door soon drew our party to the window, from which Blanche's eyes were delighted by the appearance of

her favourite Water-king, his fine coat glistening in the morning sun, his long thin tail whisking about as usual, and his rounded form seen in all its beauty under the unmounted side-saddle. 'Isn't he a darling?' exclaimed Blanche from the window, as the horse stepped proudly round to the door, pointing his small ears and glancing in every direction as though looking for his mistress. Old Thomas on a steady brown; Frank's two hunters, well-bred, weight-carrying animals; the General's black cob and the little pony-carriage completed the cavalcade, which was at length got into marching order, not without much difficulty and the issue of several contradictory orders from Uncle Baldwin, who, what with his anxiety about Blanche's mounting, and his care that Charlie should be properly wrapped up, to say nothing of his directions to every one concerning that undiscoverable passage, 'the shortest way,' was already in a white heat, and altogether in a state quite the reverse of what we should suppose anticipatory of a day's *pleasure*.

However, Blanche was in the saddle at last, and pacing quietly on with Frank by her side. The General, too, was mounted, but by no means as yet under way—so much had to be impressed on the butler in case of the Field stopping to luncheon; so much on Snaffles, who remained at home, about sundry brood mares in the paddocks, all in an interesting situation; so much on the keepers, who

neglected the earth-stopping generally; and so *very* much on the bailiff, who invariably appeared at the last moment, that had it not been for the determination evinced by the black cob, his master would have remained at the front door till dinner time,—that animal, however, a resolute, Roman-nosed conveyance, seeing his stable companions rapidly deserting him, and rejoicing moreover in a stiff neck and perfectly callous mouth, made no more ado, but took the bit between his teeth, and lowering his head to the well-known angle of insubordination, rushed doggedly to the front, bearing the General rapidly past the pony-carriage in a manner more ludicrous than dignified. Charlie was in fits. Even quiet Mrs. Delaval laughed outright; and this simple incident, perhaps, made their drive far more lively—we will not say more agreeable—than it would otherwise have been, inasmuch as they had started in solemn silence; and like all couples who feel that they are more to each other than either dares to confess, they might have remained unwillingly mute during the precious hours, from sheer inability to talk upon any topic but one, and a nervous dread of entering on that one lest an explanation should at once dispel the dream that had been the happiness of their lives. Now, however, they chatted gaily enough; and certainly if ever there was a situation calculated to raise the spirits of mortal, it was that in which our young Lancer and his ladye-love found themselves, on their

way to Crop Hill, that thirty-first of December—a drive never afterwards to be effaced from the memory of the gentle charioteer. It was one of those beautiful balmy mornings that (when we get them) make an English winter more delightful than that of any other country in the world. It can only be described by the expression which it brought to every one's lips, 'What a hunting morning!' There had been heavy rain in the night, and the freshened pastures seemed actually to smile in the sun, as ever and anon he shone out with chastened beams over copse, and meadow, and upland; the very hedges, leafless though they were, seemed to breathe the fragrance of spring; mid-winter as it was, Nature seemed to be not dead, but sweetly sleeping; the robin hopped merrily from twig to twig; the magpie jerked and chattered and flew before the pony-carriage, lighting now on this side of the lane, now on that, now disturbing its mate, now soaring away over the high thick hedge towards the distant wood. As they emerged into a line of fair open pastures, from which their view, unchecked by fence on either side, swept over a rich green vale dotted with cattle and clothed with hedge-row trees, they caught sight of their mounted friends cantering merrily along the grass ahead of them, Blanche's habit fluttering in the soft light breeze, her cavalier's red coat and shining stirrup-irons glistening in the sun, and the General bumping steadily behind them on the high-stepping black cob,

who, albeit usually an animal of imperturbable sobriety, had contracted a fatal passion for the chase, which on occasions like the present put him into a state of rebellious excitement that lasted throughout the day, and produced a sad reaction in the stable on the morrow.

'That's the best fellow in England,' said Charlie, as he pointed out his friend to his companion. 'I shall be glad when it's settled, Mrs. Delaval, as I know it soon will be.' Mary thought they were on tender ground, and applied herself diligently to her driving without producing any great increase of pace on the part of philosophical Scrub. 'Ah!' said Charlie, and his voice trembled as he spoke, 'I've envied Frank all my life, and I envy him more than ever now.'

'You *do?*' replied Mary, glancing quickly at him, while her heart for the moment seemed to stand still.

'Not his bride, Mrs. Delaval,' replied Charlie, 'for his bride you'll see she will be. No, no; I'm very fond of Blanche, but not in that way.' Mary was blushing crimson, and it was surprising what a deal of driving that little pony required as Charlie proceeded. 'But I envy him all he has that I can never have again—health, strength, all that makes life enjoyable—all that was once mine, but that I feel I have now lost for ever.'

'Don't say so,' replied Mary though her rising

tears almost choked her utterance, 'don't say so. With care and good advice, and all of *us* to nurse you, oh you must, you *shall* get well;' but even as she spoke she felt a sad foreboding at her heart. Charlie caught her glance though it was almost instantly averted, and he proceeded as if half to himself.

'I could bear it well enough if I was like Frank in one respect, if I knew my life was bound to another's and that other the one I care most for in the world. I could struggle on for *her* sake; but no, I shall leave none such behind *me*, and perhaps it is better.'

'Do you think we are all so heartless?' she burst forth, 'do you think we can part with you without a murmur? with *you*, for whom we have watched and prayed and longed all those dreary months, dreary indeed whilst you were——' Mary stopped short. She felt she had said too much, but it was Charlie's turn to blush now. His breath came quick and short, the boy dared not look the woman in the face, but he put his hand into his bosom and drew out a glove—a white kid glove it was formerly, now sadly soiled and discoloured, for a gallant heart had been beating against it many a long month—but with a rim of velvet round the wrist; there was no doubt of its identity, nor of the fair hand it once had fitted. Charlie drew it out and pressed it to his lips. She turned on him one swimming glance.

They understood each other; the moment had at length arrived when—

'*Gently* Ravager! back hounds, back!'—and the loud crack of a hunting-whip disturbed their romantic *tête-à-tête* at this critical moment, and announced the proximity of that well-known pack denominated the Hark-holloa Hounds, trotting gently on towards the place of meeting, and rapidly overtaking the pony-carriage and its preoccupied inmates. The noble impulse of equine emulation, usually dormant in the shaggy form of Scrub, was now aroused by inspirating influence of the passing pageant, and the clean, dainty-looking, motley-coloured pack; the neat, well-appointed servants in their bright scarlet coats and glossy velvet caps; the well-bred, well-groomed, hunting-looking horses they bestrode stepping airily along, jingling their bits, and snorting to the morning breeze. All these objects raised the mettle of Blanche's quiet pony, and Mary had now enough to do in earnest; as he tugged at the reins and drew them rapidly on in rear of the pack towards a slight elevation in the distance crowned by a windmill, and rejoicing in the dignified title of Crop Hill. A renewal of the tender subject was impossible, for as they neared the trysting-place the plot thickened rapidly, and sportsman after sportsman cantering by on his cover-hack had a bow for Mrs. Delaval, and a word to exchange with Charlie, now congratulating him on his return; now con-

doling with him for his inability to ride, now cordially hoping that he will soon be in the saddle, with an inquiry after the welfare of the celebrated Haphazard. Charlie's spirits rose as they proceeded, and ere they reached the windmill he was a boy again.

'Yoi, over there!'—holloaed the huntsman standing in his stirrups and waving the willing pack into the cover, a patch of sunny gorse lying on the south side of the hill, and commanding a vale of large green pastures that to contemplate alone brought the light into Charlie's eye.

'This way,' said the general, sidling and piaffing and coming tail first towards the pony-carriage, for the double purpose of placing it in a favourable position for viewing the proceedings, and of exhibiting his own horsemanship before the eyes of Mrs. Delaval. The General was under the impression that if there was one thing in which more than another he excelled, it was the art of *manège*-equitation, and perhaps on an animal less self-willed than the black cob, he might have been a very Bellerophon, but certainly at the present juncture he jerked and fumed and kicked and wiped his brows in anything but a graceful mode of progression.

'This way,' said he, after a violent effort which brought the cob broadside on across Scrub, whose recognition, however, his excited friend disdained to acknowledge.

'From the brow of this hill you can see for miles. If we don't find here. How d'ye mean *don't* find here? If there's no fox in the gorse I 'll eat this hunting-whip!' eyeing his own iron-handled one as he spoke. 'If you keep along the—(stand *still* you brute!) if you keep along the brow, Mrs. Delaval—(Zounds! *will* you stand still?) you 'll be able to—Tally-ho! he's away, d'ye see him, yonder by the oak! now they have it. Forward! Forward!!' Charlie could not resist a prolonged screech of delight, though he coughed for five minutes afterwards, and the General went off at score, as eager for a start as if he had been riding the best horse in England, and bumped and thumped and scuttled and slid down the hill, towards a friendly hand-gate, as only an elderly gentleman can, who has survived all his passions save this one alone! What a scurry there was over the vale below. Immediately in the foreground a group of foot people, a keeper in velveteen, and a labourer with a terrier in his arms, laughed and gazed and vociferated, and made sundry uncomplimentary remarks on the sportsmen whose prowess they could so effectually overlook. Lower down careful grooms on second horses, a steady-going dark-coated array, had diverged nearly at right angles to the line of chase, and keeping studiously together, seemed to be holding perseveringly for some point of their own, well down-wind. At the bottom of the hill a horse-breaker, on a four-year

old rearing straight on end, was endeavouring to make the passage of a white gate that had slammed to, unpropitiously just in front of him. As the man had dropped his whip and did not dare get off, he was likely to remain there some little time longer. Just in front of him again came the Field, a motley mass of colours, red predominating—streaming like a flight of wildfowl, as they crossed the inclosures, but huddling confusedly together as often as they reached the fence, under the mistaken notion that there is safety in numbers.

Amongst them were men of all sorts and ages, ranks, weights, and sizes—some plying elbows and legs as they shot occasionally to the front, only to drop back to their native obscurity when the fatal necessity of jumping should arrive—some holding steadily on, satisfied to be in good company, with no more idea of where the hounds were than if they had been in the next county—discreet spirits breaking the hearts of valorous horses by keeping them back—eager enthusiasts rapidly finishing their too sorry steeds by urging them forward, but still one and all convinced that they were distinguishing themselves by their prowess, and prepared to swear over their wine that they had been all day in the front rank. To the right of these might be seen the General in a line of his own, leading him through a deep ridge and furrow field, in which he laboured like a boat in a heavy sea—already its inequalities had brought

him to a slack rein, and even at that distance the rider's heels could be plainly distinguished in convulsive persuasion.

Five minutes more at that pace would unquestionably reduce the black cob to a walk. A field further forward than these, and released from the turmoil and confusion in their rear, struggled a devoted band, the forlorn hope of the chase—those adventurous spirits who 'mean riding,' but 'don't know how'—though small in number great in hair-breadth 'scapes and thrilling casualties. There a rood and a half of fence was seen tumbling into a field with a crash like the falling of a house, followed by a headlong biped describing a parabola in the air, and closely attended by a huge dark object which resolved itself into a rolling steed. Further on again a crashing of rails was heard, and a reckless pair seen balanced across a strong piece of field-upholstery, only to subside dully into a fatal ditch gaping to receive them, not in vain:

Rider and horse in one red burial blent.

A wisp of scarlet lying motionless on the greensward, and a loose horse galloping furiously to the front, completed this ill-fated portion of the panorama, and carried the eye forward to where some half-dozen detached cavaliers were gradually diminishing till they looked like red balls bouncing over a billiard-table, as independent and nearly abreast each sped

his own line across the distant fields. These were indeed the 'chosen few'—the deacons of the craft, quick, quiet, wary, and resolute—they had surmounted all the obstacles of the commencement, all the struggle for a start, and were now enjoying their reward. Each man as he took his horse well by the head settled himself in his saddle, and scanning his ground with keen and practised eye, crashed through the impervious bullfinch or faced the uncompromising timber, enjoying a deep thrilling ecstasy totally incomprehensible to the rational portion of mankind. A Frenchman once remarked to us anent this particular form of lunacy. 'Monsieur, nous ne cherchons pas nos émotions, nous Français, à nous casser le cou?' But deep and stirring were the *émotions* of our English enthusiasts, as they strained after the fleeting pack, now diminished to a few white scattered dots glancing over the green surface a field ahead even of these.

'Happy fellows!' exclaimed Charlie, watching the first flight, where his own place should have been, with straining eyes. 'It looks uncommonly like a run!—but where 's Frank? he ought to be forward with the hounds. Oh! he 's philandering there on the right with Blanche,' and Charlie's mouth drew itself down into an expression of intense disgust—although in love himself he could not understand Venus being allowed to interfere with Diana. 'If we keep down this lane,' exclaimed he, still bending his

gaze on the disappearing pack, 'we shall come in upon them again, to a certainty, with this wind. Wilmington-copse is his point, I 'll lay my life. Go along, Scrub!' and the pony-carriage was immediately set in motion, not without flagellation of Blanche's favourite, bumping and swaying down an extremely bad road at the best speed it could muster. Ever and anon the drivers cast a look over the vale at the fast-disappearing chase, but the excitement was rapidly subsiding. All the reds had by this time vanished, save one extremely cautious sportsman in a lane; the more sober colours were gradually fading into the distance. The horse-breaker was gone, the keeper in velveteen shouldered his gun, the labourer put down his terrier, and the pedestrians were lounging home to dinner. After two miles or so of severe exertion the panting Scrub was again pulled up at Stoney-cross, a place where four by-roads met, commanding an extensive view of the surrounding country. Mary was almost as keen about the run as her companion, so catching is excitement, particularly hunting excitement. 'Listen,' said she, intently eyeing the distance, 'can you hear anything?'

'Nothing but Scrub blowing,' replied Charlie: 'no, they're having an *extraordinary* run,—we shall never see them again!'

Both strained their eyes till they watered. Profound silence reigned over the landscape, save when the wintry wind moaned softly through the boughs

of some leafless poplars overhead. The sun had disappeared, a dark grey haze was creeping over the distance; even Nature seemed to be suffering a reaction after the excitement of the last half-hour, and Charlie too felt despondent and melancholy; the air was moist and chill, the sky dark and lowering; it was the last day of the year—would he ever see another? Must he leave this pleasant world, pleasant even in the subdued melancholy of winter's russet garb, and lie in the damp cold earth, whilst his friends and comrades were full of life and hope and energy? The last time—was this indeed the *last time* for him of the sport he loved so passionately? No more to back his gallant steeds and feel his life-blood thrill, as they bounded beneath him in the real ecstasy of motion; no more to join the jovial scarlet throng, with bit and bridle ringing round him, and laugh and jest and cordial greeting passing from lip to lip in that merriest of merry meetings at the covert side; no more to stand in the deep fragrant wood-land and cheer that chiming music to the echo, sweeter to him than the very symphony of heaven; and when silence, startling from its suddenness, succeeded to those maddening sounds, and warned him they were *away!* others would race with the racing pack, and revel in the whirlwind of *pace*, glancing over the pastures like hawks upon the wing, but his place would be vacant in the front rank, and he—where would he be? Hard! hard! now that life was so

sweet and sparkling, now that the cup was crowned with that last drop that bid it brim with happiness—the consciousness of love. And must it be put untasted by? Hard—hard—yet perhaps better so!'

'I hear them, I 'm certain,' said Mary, raising her taper hand in the air; 'that must be the horn. We shall see the finish after all!'

'Not yet,' cried Charlie, all his melancholy reflections dispelled on the instant. 'See, they've checked on the plough yonder. Now they acknowledge it. Well hunted, my beauties! Look! look! did you see him?—there, in the middle of that large field, beyond the spinny!'

Mary looked and looked, and at length made out a dark speck stealing away in the distance too slowly for a crow, too smoothly for a dog; had she not been told she never would have suspected that minute object was the fox.

'He 's not killed YET,' observed Charlie; 'there 'll be some *grief* before HE 's in hand! See, he 's pointing straight for the forest—by Jove! they 'll have to swim the Gushe. What a capital fox!' And now, once more, the pageant passed in full view of the pony-carriage; but oh! how altered. Despite the check there were but two men near the hounds, and even these were a full field behind them (after dinner they acknowledged to twenty yards); then came one solitary individual in a cap, who was indeed the huntsman, and who was now riding in the combined enjoyment

of a horse completely exhausted, and a morbid dread lest the more fortunate twain in his front should press too much on his treasures—a needless fear, could he but have seen the mode in which these treasures were increasing the distance between themselves and their pursuers. Behind him again was a gentleman (clerical) standing by his horse, apparently investigating his stirrup-irons with minute interest. He never could be got to explain clearly why he had stopped at this exciting moment. Gaining gradually upon the latter, came another red coat, making the most of an extremely slow canter; and not a soul besides was to be seen on the line of the hounds. What had become of them all? Where was the Field? Why, pounding down the very lane in which the pony-carriage had drawn up, pulling and hustling and grinning and clattering—coat-tails flying, neck-cloths streaming, the leaders' faces bathed in perspiration, the rearward horsemen plastered with mud, all riding like grim Death, all frantic with hurry and excitement,—the General and his black cob not the least furious of the throng. Few noticed the carriage, all were intent on some object in the extreme distance, possibly the bridge at Deep-ford, inasmuch as the hounds were now pointing straight for the Gushe.

It was quite a relief to watch Frank Hardingstone's unmoved face as he cantered quietly by, and smiled and spoke to them, without, however, relaxing

in his vigilant care of Blanche. That young lady looked prettier than ever—her violet eyes dancing with excitement, and her long fair curls floating over her riding-habit.

'He's going to *have* it,' screamed Charlie, in a state of tumultuous excitement, as they watched Frank turn away from his charge, and leaping the fence out of the lane take a direct line for the calm, deep, silent river, and consequently for the hounds, who were already struggling in the stream, throwing their tongues occasionally as they were swept along by its force to land considerably lower down than they had calculated. One of the foremost sportsmen went gallantly in with them, but his horse was already exhausted, and, after sinking twice, rider and steed emerged separately on the hither side, glad to get off with a ducking.

'Blanche, you foolish girl, stop! I desire you to stop!' exclaimed the General, foaming with excitement, and himself with difficulty pulling the black cob across the road. But Blanche either would not or could not stop: Water-king's mettle was excited; he had been following Frank Hardingstone's horse all day, and true to his name he was not to be deterred by the perils of a swim. Taking the bit between his teeth, he bounded out of the lane at the spot where his leader had jumped the fence, and tore away over the level water-meadows, regardless of the volley of imprecations which the General sent after

him as of the feeble grasp which strove to check him in vain.

Frank meanwhile, all unconscious, sped steadily down to the stream. Already his cool resolute eye had marked the safest place at which to land. 'If I can only get *out*,' thought Frank, 'there's never much difficulty about getting *in*.' Already had he gathered his horse well upon his haunches, turned his stirrup-irons over his saddle-bow, knotted the thong of his whip to his rein in case of dissolving partnership on emergency, and sliding quietly down the bank was immersed in deep water, laying his weight as much as possible along his horse's neck, when a faint scream, a rushing sound close behind him, and a tremendous splash by his side, made him turn wildly round and well-nigh pull his unfortunate steed over him in the water. How shall we describe his sensations at what he saw?—Water-king plunging and rearing himself above the surface; Blanche clinging helplessly to her horse's neck, her white face glancing on him for an instant with an expression of ghastly terror; another furious plunge, a faint bubbling scream, and the limp skirt of a riding-habit disappearing beneath the whirling wave. The horror-stricken sportsmen in the lane saw a lady's hat floating on the stream some fifty yards lower down. But assistance was near at hand; twenty men were soon gathered on the bank. People never know how these things are done. Frank was away from his

horse in an instant: he believes he dived for her twice; but two minutes had scarcely elapsed before he was hanging over her exhausted form on the bank, regardless of the surrounding crowd, regardless of his usual self-command and reserved demeanour, pouring forth the torrent of his feelings, so long dammed up, in words that were but little short of madness.

It was fortunate, indeed, that Scrub's fatigue had prevented the pony-carriage from going any farther on the line of the crowd, who were by this time blocking up the narrow passage of Deep-ford Bridge, as Blanche, despite her wet clothes, was too much exhausted to attempt riding home, and was accordingly placed by Mary in her own little equipage. The pony made small difficulty about retracing his steps towards his stable, and the cavalcade proceeded rapidly to Newton-Hollows; Frank riding alongside in his dripping garments, with an expression of unspeakable joy on his manly features never seen there before or since; Mary praying inwardly with heartfelt gratitude, and the General sobbing like a child. As they turned in at the gates, Charlie was the only one of the party who retained his composure sufficiently to observe, with an expression of deep interest, 'I wish we knew whether they 've killed their fox.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

'The Sad Sea Wave.'

THE HONEYMOON—OUTWARD-BOUND—A FULL REPORT—THE HOPES OF SPRING—THE BLIGHT OF AUTUMN—ALL ALONE.

AND of all places in the world where did they choose to spend their honeymoon? Why, at St. Swithin's; there they had first met—there the girl had first seen her young ideal of manly perfection—there Frank had first surrendered the self-control he held so dear. When at the end of a twenty-seventh chapter the gentleman saves from drowning the lady after whom he has been hankering through the previous twenty-six, it is needless to specify how 'bride-cake must be the issue.' 'Hot water' after cold is a fair conclusion; so the dressmaker in Old Bond-street was written to—and the man-of-business came down from Lincoln's-Inn—and there was a gathering of friends and relatives—a breakfast to the grandees—a dinner to the tenants—a ball to the labourers—and the bells of Newton ringing almost without cessation for eight-and-forty hours—the bridesmaids smiled and sparkled—the bride wept and trembled—the bridegroom looked like a fool—everything was strictly orthodox, save the interference

of the General, who wanted to set the clergyman right during the sacred ceremony, and very properly received a rap over the knuckles from that dignitary, which was no less than he deserved—the county paper devoted a column and a half to its description of the ceremony—the *Morning Post* dismissed it in three lines under the head of 'Fashionable Intelligence;' and so the knot was tied, and Frank Hardingstone, M., took Blanche Kettering, N., and they became man and wife.

We must now shift the scene to where we first introduced the characters of our somewhat lengthened narrative; nor will we, after the fashion of sundry eminent divines, prolong our 'in conclusion' to an indefinite abusing of the listener's patience and the Queen's English. The honeymoon is over—they never last more than a week now-a-days—and the relatives of the principal performers have broken up the *tête-à-tête*, and joined the happy pair at St. Swithin's. It is a mild sunny afternoon about the middle of February. At the sea-side, where there are no bare trees and leafless hedges to destroy the illusion, it might be midsummer, so soft and balmy is the air, so bright the beams glinting on the Channel, so hushed and peaceful the ripple of the ebbing tide; the fishing-boats seem asleep upon the waters; a large square-rigged vessel looms almost motionless in the offing; and a group of five persons are congregated about an invalid's couch on the beach. As

Mary Delaval moves round it to place a cushion more comfortably at his back, we recognise the delicate features and waving moustaches of our young Lancer. It is indeed the wasted face of 'Cousin Charlie,' attenuated to an unearthly beauty, and wearing the calm gentle expression of those who are ere long to be summoned home.

'Outward-bound,' says a stout seaman-like man, shutting up the glass with which he has been diligently conning the distant ship. 'Outward-bound, and an Indiaman, as I make her, Miss Blanche; I beg your pardon.' Hairblower never can call her by her matronly title.

'If that's an Indiaman, I'll eat her,' exclaims the General; 'don't tell me—I should know something of that class of ship at any rate. Look at her spars! She's bound for the Baltic, I can take my oath. Indiaman!—if she's not a Dutchman, *I am*.'

The General's appearance indeed gave weight to this assertion. His stout short frame enveloped in a jacket and trousers—for out of compliment to the locality, he thought it necessary to appear in nautical costume—possessed that well-filled appearance which custom has chosen to consider indigenous to the Hollander. The General's love-making did not progress very rapidly, but he had still a hankering to stand well in the opinion of Mrs. Delaval; and when he considered the care and attention with which she tended poor Charlie, administering to all his wants

and fancies as only a woman can, he thought that such a wife would indeed be a treasure for an elderly gentleman who was beginning to experience sundry twinges at the extremities, reminding him most unpleasantly of good things long since consumed, and claret bottles emptied in Life's thirsty noon.

'What do *you* think, darling?' says Blanche, sidling up to her husband, and placing her arm confidingly within his. Like all newly-married women she is a little *gauche*, and wears her happiness with too demonstrative an air, appealing on all occasions to her lord, and hanging on his every word and look as if there were no one else in the universe. To do the sex justice, however, this is a fault of which they are invariably cured in less than a twelvemonth, and radically too—we cannot call to mind a single instance of a relapse.

'How should I know, my dear?' replies Frank, awaking from deep thought; 'yet stay, may it not be the very ship in which your old friend D'Orville was to sail?' with a malicious glance at Blanche, who looked up at him with such an open smile as showed how little impression the handsome Major's attentions had ever made on *her* young heart. 'Let me see, what day was he to start? I 've got his letter in my pocket.'

'Pocket!—letter!—what? read it!' exclaimed the General—'that will prove the thing at once—you 'll see she 's a Dutchman.'

Blanche glanced at Mary; and even that grave face brightened into a smile—while Frank, seating himself on the shingle, drew a letter from his pocket and began to read.

'Cannot resist—hem—congratulations—hem—blessings in store—hem—leaving this country for a long absence.' (Ah! here it is). 'As I am going out in command of troops, I shall have the pleasure of once more rubbing up my seamanship by a voyage round the Cape. We embark at Gravesend on the —, and shall probably sail when the tide suits the following day.' ('Gad—I believe it is the Indiaman!) 'Lacquers accompanies me, having got the Majority in my corps, and has become a *great* soldier—perhaps thanks to your success in the attack on which I now write to congratulate you.' (Here's a long story about *you*, Blanche—shall I read it?) Blanche passed her little hand over his mouth, and Frank proceeded. 'As I shall probably not have another opportunity of writing to my English friends for four or five months, I will not apologise for the length of my present epistle, but give you all the news I can to enliven your honeymoon, a piece of presumption which, I conclude, is like refining refined gold or painting the lily. London is not very full, although Parliament has brought its regular quantum of members who stand in awe of their constituents—no small number in these reformed and reforming days. *I* recollect, my dear Frank, though *you* don't, when all

the electors for a county met in the Justices' room, and returned the Lord Lieutenant's nominee with as little discussion' as my orderly-sergeant will make this afternoon when he reports 'the officers' baggage gone on board.' However, they won't stand that kind of thing now. Talking of Parliament, you read Mount Helicon's speech on the Tallow question, of course. It quite took the House by storm. Honourable members expected *something* from the author of *Broadsides from the Baltic*, and they were not disappointed. Not a word, however, taken from that exceedingly clear and voluminous pamphlet; and where he can have picked up such an additional store of information is a mystery to every one. The speech, however, has floored his party. Its whole tone, every sentiment it breathed, was so diametrically opposite to their policy, that they found themselves at its conclusion without a leg to stand on. Having selected him for their mouth-piece, they were furious, and no wonder. What can he be at? We soldiers are plain-dealing men, and cannot understand all this mining and counter-mining. His lady-mother, I understand, is still at Bubbleton. You must have seen something of her in the winter, unless you had only eyes and ears for one—particularly as I hear she gives out everywhere that she has refused General Bounce. If your abrupt uncle is the man I take him for, she never had an opportunity.' (Frank was here obliged to pause, the

General's delight at this portion of the letter venting itself in a series of chuckles that threatened to choke him. It was with difficulty he restrained himself from relating the whole story of the widow at Cheltenham, as a narrative bearing irresistibly on the case in point. He swallowed it, however, and Frank proceeded.) 'We never thought her ladyship a great beauty, but they tell me now she is dreadfully altered—disappointed about her son—disappointed in her winter campaign—dreadfully sore at the slights she fancies she has received from the Dinadams, who, passing through Bubbleton on their way to Wassailworth, had no time to return the visit she paid them at their hotel—and conscious of growing old, without having done the slightest good in her generation. No wonder the worn-out fine lady is sick of her wretched world, such as it is—no wonder she is startled to discover that she has spent a lifetime of illusions and never found out the *real* world after all. You will smile, my dear Frank, at my moralities, but I do begin to see things a little clearer than I used; and if I have reason so bitterly to regret the forty years I have spent in selfish uselessness, what must be the feelings of threesore years and odd, with the world slipping from under its feet, the waking moment rapidly approaching, and the feverish dream leaving not one solid reality behind it—not one satisfactory reflection to gild the Past—not one well-grounded hope to hold a beacon through the dark cold voyage of the Future?'

Hairblower, who had been listening attentively with a puzzled expression of countenance, brightened up considerably at a metaphor which had reference to his own daily occupations, and muttered something about 'ballast a-board' and the 'anchor a-peak;' whilst Mrs. Delaval stole a longing, lingering look at poor Charlie, who had closed his eyes as if wearied out and half-asleep. Frank read on.

'Tell young Kettering I have many inquiries after his health from his friends here, amongst others, an old fellow-campaigner in Kaffirland whose tent he shared, and who is full of Kettering's famous attack in support of the Rifles. He says it was one of the most dashing things of the war, and the service can ill afford to lose so gallant an officer. He sends his own and his terrier's kindest remembrances.'

Charlie's eyes opened wide; he did not seem drowsy now. The long wasted fingers of his right hand closed as if upon the handle of his sword, and a light stole over his countenance as if the sun had just gleamed athwart it—the soldier-spirit was stirring in that powerless frame. He looked handsomer than ever, poor boy, poor boy!

'His admiring well-wisher,' the letter went on to say, 'who, by the way, is one of the best-looking fellows in London, got his promotion in that very action, and is now on leave, making up for past privations be every kind of dissipation which the village affords. I do not see much of him; but

dining last night at the 'Peace-and-Plenty,' he told me that our mutual friend, Sir Ascot was going to be married. Mrs. Hardingstone will be amused to hear this. The fortunate lady is a Miss Deeper, who threw over young Cashley, as in duty bound, for the baronet. Laurel, too, has carried off pretty Kate Carmine at last; they are the poorest couple in Christendom, and the happiest. I met Sir Bloomer Buttercup yesterday at the 'Godiva.' He and Mulligatawney were as usual discussing the matrimonial question; the latter more 'Malthusian than ever,' since Mrs. M. has taken up the Rapping theory. Sir Bloomer thinks that now he can only pretend to a widow, but is still determined to marry as soon as his affairs can be put 'on a footing.' We are all of opinion if he waits till then he will die a bachelor. You are aware I have got my promotion, and am going out to take the command of one of the smartest regiments in the service. I trust it will not deteriorate in any way whilst in my hands. Lacquers unites with me in congratulations and cordial good wishes to the whole of your party. If Mrs. Delaval is with you, remember me most kindly to her, and believe me,' etc.

'Well done the Colonel,' said Frank, folding up his letter and putting it in his pocket. 'I never saw a man so changed and so improved. Blanche, don't you regret now?—eh?' Blanche laughed and called him 'a goose;' but Mary applied herself more assi-

duously than ever to the invalid's cushions; and whatever may have been her thoughts she kept them most carefully to herself. We can guess, however, that notwithstanding the many good qualities developing themselves in her old admirer, she never for an instant thought of comparing him with that poor helpless boy whom they were now obliged to carry into the house, lest even the soft evening breeze should strike too chill upon his lacerated lungs. Next to Mary, however, perhaps none tended the sufferer with such patience and gentleness as Hairblower—that worthy's view of the malady and its cause was peculiar to himself, and he clung to it with heroic obstinacy. 'It all came of making him a soger,' said the seaman, with a tear running down his weather-beaten cheek; 'goin' about half-dressed in them monkey-jackets, and sleepin' out o' nights without a dry thread to bless theirselves—it 's enough to kill a cat, let alone a gentleman. Now if he 'd had a dry plank above and below, and a hammock to swing in, and watches to keep all regular and ship-shape, he 'd have lived to be an admiral—see if he wouldn't. But he 's better, is Master Charlie, much better, now the *salt's* gettin' into him. Oh, he 'll be well in no time now, will Master Charlie—not a doubt of it!'

'Not a doubt of it,' echoed the General, the illness of whose favourite was a sad cause of grief and anxiety, which vented themselves in a more than customary abruptness and irritation. 'Better? How

d'ye mean? Zounds, sir, don't talk to me of doctors! I tell ye the lad's rallying—rallying, sir. What? If that boy's not a-horseback in June, I'll——' And here the warm-hearted old General's courage invariably gave way, and as he thought of the alternative he would burst into tears, and stump hastily off to hide his emotion.

There never was such a February as that. Even inland people congratulated themselves on enjoying at last a *really* mild winter; and in such a sheltered, sunshiny situation as St. Swithin's the weather would have borne comparison with any boasted climate of the warm Mediterranean. Like some poor draggled pining bird, the invalid seemed to drink in health and strength from the very sunbeams; and as he lay full-length upon his couch, drawn as near the waves as the tide would allow, and basked in the warmth, and inhaled the soft fresh breezes of the Channel, he looked so composed, so happy; and the cough, though frequent, became so much less violent, that all agreed there never was 'anything so providential as bringing him down to St. Swithin's'—'these illnesses are only fatal when not taken in time'—'positively it was the very saving of the boy's life.' But Mary looked very pale, and shook her head. She seldom spoke much now.

One evening, just at sundown, Charlie begged to speak to Uncle Baldwin alone. He was lying as usual close to the open window, and as the breeze

fanned his cheek he seemed to drink in its fragrance with a keener zest than he had shown for days. He felt better and stronger, too; he was able to sit up, and his voice was steadier and fuller than it had been since he came home. He spoke almost jestingly of his present state; but the words of hope which he thought it right to affect in consideration of his uncle's feelings were belied by the topic on which he sought an interview.

'Uncle,' said he, 'you've been a father to me, and I've never been strong enough to thank you till to-day.'

'Stronger, my boy—to be sure you are—virtually, you're quite well. Don't tell——' There was something in Charlie's smile that checked the General, and the boy went on—

'Life's very uncertain, uncle, and if—you know I only say *if* I should not get over this business, I want you to arrange two or three little matters for me. This is a beautiful world, uncle, and a pleasant one; but I sometimes think I'd rather *not* live now. I—I don't mind going. No, I don't seem as if I belonged so much to this earth—I can't tell why, but I *feel* it, I'm sure I do. Well, dear Uncle Baldwin, when I'm *gone*, I want you to give as much of my money to poor Gingham as will enable her to go out and join her husband in Australia. I know she wishes it, and I think it would come better from me than any one. If I get well, I mean to do it myself;

but I like to make sure; and—and—uncle'—a deep blush spread over Charlie's face—'all the rest I wish to go to Mrs. Delaval; but don't let her find out it's from me. Promise me, dear Uncle Baldwin—promise me this.'

The General started. He began to see what he now thought himself very blind not to have seen long ago, but he promised faithfully enough; and Charlie, lying back as if a weight had been taken off his mind, added, with a placid smile, 'One thing more, Uncle, and I will not trouble you any more—take care of poor Haphazard, aud never let him run in a steeple-chase again.' The General's heart was in his eyes, but he concealed his feelings from the invalid; and this too he promised, much to Cousin Charlie's satisfaction, who talked on so cheerfully and avowed himself to feel so much better, that when at last Uncle Baldwin left him he joined the rest of the party more sanguine than any of them of his ultimate recovery, and vowed 'he could not have believed what the sea-air would do.' 'You may sigh, Mrs. Delaval, and shake your head, but he's as strong to-day as ever he was in his life. Lungs!—his lungs are as good as mine. What? he's only outgrown his strength—don't tell me, the lad's six feet high. Why I saw Globus this very day, and he assures me confidently that he thinks Charlie will be quite well by the spring.'

* * * *

Spring bloomed into summer and summer faded into autumn—when London became empty, that is to say when some thousand or two of its millions took their departure from the swarm, we went, as is our custom, to court health and sea-breezes at St. Swithin's. Though we follow blindly the example of our kind, rushing tumultuously to crowded resorts and overflowing watering-places, yet do we love solitude in the abstrac as do most men who have outlived their digestions, and consequently we were not disappointed to find the day after our arrival so gusty, gloomy and disagreeable that the fair-weather visitors were compelled to remain indoors, and we had the beach pretty well to ourselves. There was a thick haze over the Channel, and a small drizzling rain beat in our face. We may be peculiar, but we confess we have no objection to a fog, and rather like a drizzling rain, so we breasted the breeze and walked boldly on till we got clear of the town, and keeping steadily along 'high-water mark' could enjoy our humour of sulking undisturbed.

But one figure shared our solitude. A tall handsome woman, dressed in the deepest mourning, short of widow's weeds, that we ever saw. As we passed her, she was gazing steadily to sea-ward, and we caught but one glimpse of her countenance, yet that face we never have forgotten. Care had hollowed the eyes and wasted the pale cheek, and streaked the masses of dark hair with many a silver line, but the

deep expression of holy beauty that sat on those marble features was as that of an angel—some spirit sorrowing for the spirit-band from which it was parted, and yearning for its home. She was listening intently to the regular and monotonous gush of the Channel-waves as they poured in their steady measured music, like a requiem for the dead. A well-beloved voice spoke to her on the sighing breeze, an old familiar strain was borne upon the rolling waters: she was communing with another world, and we left her, but not alone.

Mary Delaval has never quitted St. Swithin's Marble, wrought to warlike trophies, blazons in a lengthened inscription the blighted fame and early death of a blooming warrior, who dragged his sinking frame hither to gaze upon the shining waters, and so to die. But it is not in the stately aisle or over the speechless stone that Mary weeps for her lost hopes, and mourns her buried love. No, she had rather wander by the lonely shore and listen to the 'sad sea waves,' as they murmur their mournful tale of the unforgotten Past. Day by day, ay, night by night, she glides about amongst the poor, ever on errands of mercy—ever eager but for one thing on earth—to do good—to fulfil her destiny—to die *here* where *he* died—and so to go to *him*. By the bed of sickness, in the abode of misery—ay, in the very den of vice, if it be but hallowed by grief, that pale sad face is as well known as the High Church curate's or

the parish doctor's; but the poor respect her sorrows; and the rough fisherman, the busy artizans, the very careless romping children will turn out of the path; and forbear to intrude upon the presence of 'the dark lady,' as she sits looking wistfully to seaward, or wanders dejectedly along the beach. They seem to feel that she is *with* them, but not *of* them—a sojourner here, but not for long.

We love to gaze on the blooming merry faces of the young—we can admire the bright hopeful girl—the contented happy matron—childhood—prime—and old age. All have their beauties, all reflect more or less vividly the image of their Creator; but never in mortal features have we seen such a heavenly expression as that borne by Mary Delaval with her aching heart; deeper than hope, holier than joy, it hallows those alone whose every tie to lower earth is torn asunder, whose treasure is not here, whose home is beyond the grave—of whom infinite mercy has said, 'Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted.'

END OF VOL. II.

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